

# SPIN

## ANNIE LENNOX

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

MIDNIGHT OIL  
GEORGE BURNS  
DEE SNIDER  
BILLY BRAGG  
WEIRD AL YANKOVIC  
SONIC YOUTH  
GUADALCANAL DIARY

EXCLUSIVE:  
**IKE  
TURNER**  
WHAT IKE HAD  
TO DO WITH IT:  
THE FLIP SIDE  
TO TINA'S STORY





## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUR CRUISER AND THEIRS IS AS PLAIN AS BLACK AND WHITE.

They could see it as soon as I rode my new Suzuki Intruder into town. No other cruiser looks as custom. No other V-twin sounds this mean. No other streetbike had ever grabbed their attention like my Intruder. Chrome on chrome on chrome. From its headlight right down to its 60-spoke wheels, Intruder is mean, clean and classic. And underneath Intruder's heart-thumping good looks Suzuki packed the leanest 45° V-twin on the road.

That's what grabbed my soul. 'Cause when I'm riding my Intruder I become an Intruder. It's like we were made for each other.

Like we're one single moving part. Man, the difference between my Intruder and every other bike on the street is as plain as black and white.

**THE 1986 INTRUDER VS700GL:**  
699cc, 4-stroke, liquid-cooled, 45° V-twin, 8-valve TSCC. Maintenance-free automatic cam tensioners and electronic ignition. Low maintenance hydraulic clutch, smooth shaft-drive. Seat height, 27". Intruder is also available in black with flat or pullback handle bars.

*Suzuki wants every ride to be a safe one. Always wear a helmet, eye protection and riding apparel. Call the Motorcycle Safety Foundation at 1-800-447-4700 for a riding course near you.*



WORKS LIKE A SINGLE MOVING PART.

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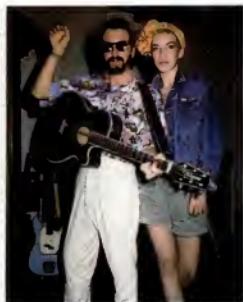
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**TOPSPIN/Introductions** 6

**FLASH**

Fishbone; Elizabeth Daily; Eek-a-Mouse;  
Doppelganger; Another Hip-Hop Movie; Wendy  
Chambers; World Beat; Drum Beats;  
Puppets, Meat. 8

**KING OF THE ROAD**

Billy Bragg abandoned the punk scene to  
become a new-age minstrel, or a modern Bob  
Dylan. By Sue Cummings. 16

**BUBBLIN' CRUDE**

Midnight Oil, Australia's most influential  
band, remains an underground phenomenon  
in the United States. By Bill Wolfe. 18

**THE BEAT FARMERS: A FIELD STUDY**

Some good ol' boys from San Diego drink a  
lot of beer and play wild rockabilly-country-  
blues. By John Leland. 20

**THE PORTABLE LEONARD COHEN**

The Old Master is the unlikely godfather of such  
bands as Scraping Faetus Off the Wheel, the  
Flying Lizards, Sisters of Mercy, Jay Division, and  
Nick Cave. By Scott Cohen. 24

**SPINS/Records** 28

**UNDERGROUND** 34

**SINGLES** 36

**IKE'S STORY**

Ike Turner talks about Tina, sex, drugs, rock 'n'  
roll, Tina, other women, hustling, touring, the  
music business, staying alive, and Tina.  
By Ed Kiersh. 38

**WHO'S THAT GIRL?**

Freeze-frame the flashing images and ask the  
question. Both Eurythmics offer their opinions.  
By Simon Garfield. 44

**THE GLAMOROUS LIFE OF  
"WEIRD AL" YANKOVIC**

Weird Al hopes to score with Madonna like he  
did with Michael Jackson.  
By Harald Conrad. 49

**SONIC YOUTH**

New York's contribution to the industrial-art  
scene. By Bryan Caley. 52

**THE FIRE THIS TIME**

Linton Kwesi Johnson would rather be a reggae  
poet than a star. By Roger Steffens. 54

**DO IT YOURSELF!**

You can produce your own record without  
spending a lot of money. Gezo X—producer for  
the Dead Kennedys, Germs, Deadbeats, and  
Red Kross—shares his secrets. 61

**NEW SOUNDS/Lakshminarayana  
Shankar** 63

**ASSISTED TWISTER**

A fan interviews Dee Snider of  
Twisted Sister. 64

**THE MAN WHO WOULD BE GOD**

George Burns of Burns and Allen; The Sunshine  
Boys; Oh, God; The George Burns Hour;  
vaudeville; radio; and Las Vegas is truly the King  
of Comedy at the age of 89.  
By Howard Rosenberg. 66

**SPIN PATROL**

Our usual, ever-vigilant watch on  
the press. 73

**THE GUAD SQUAD**

A rock band from Marietta, Georgia. Read and  
believe. By Sue Cummings. 74

# TOP SPIN

## Who's Who, What's What, and Why

When Tina Turner exploded back onto the rock scene a year and a half ago, it was with that first breathless impact with which she used to open her and Ike's stage act long, long ago, (the drum struck once like a cannon shot, the simultaneous spotlight finding her centerstage already in provocative motion, more than teasing, already seducing).

She seemed to re-emerge from some vague, colorless mist of not so much forgotten fame as misplaced memory: we knew the name, remembered the power, recognized the instantly compelling voice, and yet only now realized that we had not realized she had been away. And when she spoke and formed for us our impression of her absence, she told us things that shocked us about the unlit parts of whatever anonymity and obscurity she had apparently been in.

So she was more than just a returned former favorite, she was a survivor, too and therefore twice the heroine. And not merely welcomed back but heralded.

Throughout all the harrowing recollections, which revolved around her tumultuous marriage to Ike, one thing was missing and one thing was discovered: Where was Ike and what did he have to say? Apparently the lone figure that emerged from her forbidding tangle had no other witness.

We found Ike. He was not in hiding, per se, but well-hidden nonetheless, having bled into the deep, interlocking shadows of rumor and the Los Angeles netherworld. He hadn't talked to the press in five years—it wasn't something he had ever liked doing—and the net curtain of people around him diffused the search.

Ed Kirsch may have had some luck in getting to Ike, but if he did, let him tell you, I don't want to undermine the brilliant reporting job he did. Kirsch went to California cold. How he found his way through the maze of dead-ends and frail clues is a great story in itself, but the prize was finding Turner. "Ike's Story" (p. 38) is a skillfully crafted, illuminating portrait of a difficult, largely reluctant, largely misunderstood subject. His side of Tina's story is eye-opening, to say the least, as is everything else he has to say.

Simon Garfield's interview with Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart of Eurythmics

is also illuminating. Annie has been the butt of as much ignorant press as anyone in rock. More than misunderstood, the color of her hair and other flamboyances presumed a license to bend or ignore what she is trying to say. Although the press invariably demands that a public figure be accessible to the public, it is rarely as demanding in its own standards of fair presentation. As a result, Lennox is usually construed to be something of a freak—outrageous, which apparently we want, but apparently not this much, so she sometimes gets crucified for it. Perhaps the majority of critics would be more comfortable if Lennox simplified everything and took the obvious role of rock star symbol. Hemingway once said that critics never feel safe with someone they can't be sure of.

Maybe one day Annie Lennox will know exactly what she wants and be totally sure about everything. But I hope not, and probably does she, as that would almost certainly be the end of her creativity.

An apology to letters page, although promised. Last month I mentioned that our first letters column would publish only the letters written by people less than enamored with us, as a sort of baptism and exorcism in one. Unfortunately we didn't have the space this issue (we have the letters). Next month, though, next month!

Elsewhere in this issue: Geza X, the Quincy Jones of underground groups, has written a succinct, practical piece on how to make your own demo tape (p. 61). Next month we will publish his follow-up, which is on producing master tapes.

Scott Cohen interviewed Leonard Cohen. Harold Conrad interviewed "Weird Al" Yankovic, whose Madonna parody, "Like a Surgeon," picks up where "Eat It" left off. (I still think "Like a Virgin" is Madonna's parody of herself.)

Finally, Howard Rosenberg interviewed George Burns, the ageless comedy genius. Burns rarely gives interviews; ours (p. 66) is a gem. Incidentally (not so incidentally) to Rosenberg, television critic for *The Los Angeles Times*, recently won a Pulitzer Prize for criticism. Congratulations again, Howard.

—Bob Guccione, Jr.



Joe Sargent/Photo Int'l



George DuBoe



Halstead Nelson



Top, among her many incarnations is Annie Lennox as her most fascinating and complex personification. Middle: Ed Kirsch, the man who found Ike Turner and got him to open up. Above: Mark Weinberg (left) and George DuBoe, last seen in daylight, circa March. They posed for this supposedly candid picture for 4½ hours. Above right: "Weird Al" Yankovic.

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Where miracles never cease



Mark L. Johnson

## This is the band that brought you "Voyage to the Land of Freeze-Dried Godzilla Farts." Interested?

**Band:** Fishbone.

**Personnel:** Dirty Walt (a.k.a. Walter Adam Kibby), horn; Angelo Christopher Moore, saxophone; Christopher Gordon Dowd, keyboards; Special K (a.k.a. Kendall Rey Jones), guitar; John Norwood Fisher, bass; "Fish," drums. **Distinguishing Characteristics:** Twenty-four limbs constantly flailing, connected to six romping bodies, each with a wide-eyed grin. Fishbone's style is somewhere between Madness at its nuttiest and Jimi Hendrix—porkpie hats, plaid shirts, multicolored scarves tied everywhere, suspenders, pleated baggies, gangster suits, shades, the look is garage-sale chic, or, as Fish puts it, "We beg, steal, and borrow."

**History:** "We started in ninth grade," says Special K. "At that time there were 15 of us banging on everything in sight."

The nucleus formed in 1979, when most of the group was attending Hale Junior High School in Woodland Hills, California, in the heart of the San Fernando Valley. They started by thrashing out their own interpretation of Parliament's sound (although Fish says his mother listened to psychedelic and his father to Al Green).

Columbia Records signed Fishbone last year. Producer David (Bangles, Romeo Void) Khan was called in to tighten them musically and transfer the energy of their raucous live performances to vinyl. The result is their six-track, eponymous EP.

**Sound:** The band took the punk and ska they heard in local clubs and came up with... Fishbone music; punk plus ska plus a little reggae, dance funk, and a lot of energy.

"The only thing we can't get into is Pillsbury-dough shit, like Depeche Mode," says Special K.

**Songs:** The opening track, "Ugly, Ugly, Ugly," is, according to Fish, "about Ronald Reagan. It's about internal ugliness and world power gone mad." "Another Generation" reflects a simplicity and thoughtfulness reminiscent of Peter Townsend's earlier lyrics: "The new-age rebels have no cause." "Modern Industry" is a list of radio station call letters, and the attractively titled "Voyage to the Land of



Left: Chris Dowd. Below:  
Norwood Fisher. Above:  
"Flying Fishbones"

**Freeze-Dried Godzilla Farts** shows an unexpected bent towards heavy metal.

**Attitude:** Fish, aged 17, is still in school. "I was always rejected—until the band got somewhere—because I was ahead of my time with my

haircuts. A lot of the kids in L.A. are bored because they are pampered. They drop acid and go and sit in the park. That's not life to me. We don't take hard drugs—we're into a natural trip."

**Future Ambitions:** You name it. Europe, East Africa, the Billboard charts, the White House, "and a large share of CBS stock."



# FLASH

Fishbone;  
Meat Puppets;  
Eek-A-Mouse;  
Wendy Chambers;  
Krush Groove;  
World Beat;  
Who is Elizabeth Daily?

Edited by Jessica Berens



Andrea Butcher

## Elizabeth Daily sings like a tiny Tina Turner, dances like a Madonnarette and doesn't like men who eat Twinkies. (But then who does?)

**Favorite Sex Symbol:** Brigitte Bardot.

**Teenage Pop Idol:** Davy Jones from the Monkees.

**Favorite Female Vocalist:**

Rickie Lee Jones.

**Favorite Male Vocalist:** Rod Stewart.

**Favorite Feeling:** Gut Feelings.

**Favorite Wrestler:** Tito

Santana.

**Favorite Movie:** Pumping

Iron II.

**Biggest Turn-Off:** Men who eat Twinkies.

**Phobias:** Claustrophobia from being with someone too long (sometimes).

**Ambition:** To have an album, a video, and a baby come out at the same time.

She looks like a tiny white Tina Turner and sings like her, too. She's just 22 years old, and yet Elizabeth Daily has already made four films—*Valley Girl*, *Streets of Fire*, *Fandango*, and *Grandville, USA*—as well as the Pee Wee Herman movie to be released this summer. Some of the songs on her debut album were written with Steve Bray and some were produced by Madonna's Jellybean Benitez, which automatically calls to mind that other small bundle of sexuality. Elizabeth also dances, works out, and has a great belly button.

How did a little girl like you get such a big, powerful voice? Passion is what I like to think of it as. My voice has been changing since I started to sing when I was 14, doing R&B and soul. When I was 17, I did a blues album. Then I started working with Giorgio Moroder, and he asked me to do more rock, so I started

developing that way. I could sing operatic, if I wanted to. Over the years my voice got bigger and thicker and kept growing. What happened to the rest of you? I'm 5 feet tall and haven't grown since I was 18 years old. What kind of men are you attracted to?

Hunks. Well cut-up men, a guy who can pick me up and do manly things.

Have you ever been out with someone shorter than you?

Yes. I liked his person. That's what I found sexy about him. But it's also important to me that a person take care of his body. That's what I'm into. But he wasn't. Why are men attracted to you?

I guess because I'm fun. What are your measurements?

34-22-34.

Is your mother, who owns the punky Anti-Club in L.A., hipper than you?

She's so much hipper than me. Her hair's different colors. She has five kids and they're all musicians. She encourages creativity. My mother's into power, and if you can develop something from nothing, that's power. That's why she has this club where she lets these artists do their thing. We weren't encouraged to go to college as much as to be creative.

Did you ever go on a double-

date with your mother? Yes. We went to this bar one night and met these two English guys, a dad and his son.

When you were a cheerleader in high school, did you date the quarterback?

I always wanted to, but I never could. I wasn't the right type. What type were you? I don't know, but it wasn't the prom queen. I wanted to be the prom queen, but I was always a little too bizarre. I was into going to the Rainbow while the other kids were going to posh parties and dressing up. I was wearing leather and tacky clothes. When the hair style was CQ, mine wasn't. I was always different. I majored in drama, but in everybody's mind I was a dancer. I used to make money winning dance competitions. I had a weird car. Whatever I'd do was totally not what everybody else was doing. I still feel out of it, like I'm off beat.

—Scott Cohen



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**He's been a musketeer in London and a buccaneer in New Orleans. "People want to see you in costume," explains reggae star Eek-A-Mouse.**

It's not really the name or flashy stage gear, the close-cropped hair or lanky six-foot-six-inch frame that sets Eek-A-Mouse apart. Eek-A-Mouse isn't a DJ like Yellowman, shooting off mile-a-minute raps celebrating his virility, or a poet like Mutabaruka and England's Linton Kwesi Johnson, who use reggae rhythms to enhance eloquent, politically slanted verse. Eek-A-Mouse is a 27-year-old Jamaican toaster who truly took "The It ain't what you say, it's the way that you say it" principle to heart.

Eek-A-Mouse: "It took about six or seven years to complete the Eek-A-Mouse style, but I am not a DJ. Sometimes I make a certain sound and people say that it sounds Japanese, Chinese, African or Indian, but it's like the man that made the sound. Some are singing 'La la, whoah, yeah, yeah' but I say 'Billy-bong, billy-bong, billy-bang,' you see."

Right. If that explanation doesn't clear things, try to imagine some combination of the sounds that come out when you diddle your lips with

your fingers, a jew's harp and less-than-virtuoso jazz scat singing, filtered through a thick Jamaican accent. Think back to Musical Youth's "Pass the Dutchie," because that "Bang-bang-ling-band-biddle-band" hook is a pretty direct cop of the Eek-A-Mouse style.

Born Ripton Hylton, Eek-A-Mouse recorded two songs in 1974 "singing ordinary," but decided to quit until he developed a unique style. Seven years later, he emerged with a trademark sound and a nickname some racetrack buddies gave him for chickening out on a bet. The song "How I Got My Name," from the Mouseketeer album, tells how the horse he had been steadily beatin' on finally won . . . on the day he was too broke to bet.

"Wa-Da-Dom" was the world-wide hit that established him in 1981, even though Jamaican radio prefers to play American R&B hits and light, Top 40-style reggae. The only way most Jamaicans hear the newest songs and styles is at dances staged by mobile discos featuring DJ's spinning

discs and toasting over the rhythm tracks, similar to the rapping/breaking/hip-hop scene in New York. Those dances were the places Eek-A-Mouse first tried his new vocal delivery and gauged the public reaction.

Eek-A-Mouse: "Before 'Wa-Do-Dem' was out, I used to go down to the dance hall and sing, because you have to sing or DJ in a nightclub or dance hall to let the media see you. Knowing the excitement of the crowd, I knew that tune was going to be a hit before it came out. In four weeks, it was number one, the fastest tune to go number one in Jamaica."

"Wa-Da-Dem" is the tale of a physically mismatched couple ("She too short and me too tall") and points to a major part of Eek-A-Mouse's appeal—his sense of humor. In a field of visionaries and boasters, he's willing to poke fun at himself. His five American albums on the small, reggae specialty labels Greensleeves/Shanachie and RAS contain some serious songs, but none of the Rasta rhetoric.

Eek-A-Mouse: "I respect God and I respect all the names that people call him, but not everybody in Jamaica is a Rasta. Reggae music is the Jamaican music, not Rasta

music. Reggae is coming from rocksteady. It's a beat, like a rock beat or punk beat, but Rasta has dominated it for some time."<sup>19</sup>

His rarely lighthearted altitude permeates his live performances; Eek-A-Mouse smiles more than most reggae artists. He swoops across the stage with giant, gliding strides, wearing colorful, outlandish stage costumes. He wears full buccaneer regalia in New Orleans and an Arabian Nights harem-lover outfit in Los Angeles.

Eek-A-Mouse: "I dressed up like the Three Musketeers in London because that was the right place for that. I also played Nottingham and dressed up like Robin Hood because Robin Hood comes from Sherwood Forest. Sometimes I dress like a prisoner or a punk, and in California some day, I may be a Mexican, too. Entertaining is not just singing and rapping to audiences. People want to see you in costume and dancing."

Fortunately, Eek-A-Mouse's trademark vocal technique keeps things interesting for an entire record or show. And he has never abandoned skeletal rhythm arrangements, usually delivered on record by the ace Jamaican session band, the Root Radics.

Eek-A-Mouse is pure Jamaican pop music, and he's a solid, consistent craftsman in that area. His albums are virtually interchangeable. What he lacks is the elusive major-label deal.

Eek-A-Mouse: "I know that someday, if I have a big major deal, I will make use of it. I'm not competing, because music is not competition. My style will fit any music, not just reggae alone. I know it and I can do it. My time will come soon."

—Don Snowden



Trotter, Morris



Susan Borey

## Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Park: Wendy Chambers makes Laurie Anderson look like Sheena Easton.

Wendy Chambers thrives on the unusual. After studying classical music at Barnard College in New York, she wrote a composition that was performed in a parking lot by an orchestra of cars. The cars circled the lot while the drivers played waltz rhythms on their horns.

Fueled by inspiration, Chambers built a 25-note organ out of car horns and recorded a single—"The Star Spangled Banner." She didn't make *Solid Gold*, but "I started getting letters from people in Russia and Poland who said they couldn't send money out of their country, but they wished I would send them a record anyway. There's a few out there."

A subsequent symphony was played on 10 grand pianos and accompanied by laser lights at Manhattan's Lincoln Center ("I lost about \$5,000 on that"). In a Greenwich Village park, 50 musicians performed variations on the theme from *Close Encounters* while members of the audience simultaneously moved their portable radios to a station that was broadcasting another section of the piece. "Music For Choreographed Rowboats" combined the talents of 20 musicians and the Columbia University crew team. Clad in beachwear, members of the orchestra were rowed around a Central Park lake in patterns that changed with the shifting musical themes.

Chambers doesn't expect to win a Grammy. For her, artistic freedom is more important than becoming a household name.

"Accessibility is very important to me, but it's a nice feeling to have my own corner. I don't have to go

through all this competitive stuff, which I think is real bad energy. I'm not fighting or trying to hone in on anyone else's space."

She grew up, she says, "in a typical middle-class suburb in New Jersey. My mother, who could not sing 'Happy Birthday' in key, and my father, who had a great ear but no sense of art, decided I needed piano and violin lessons. I took up composing because I was too lazy to practice."

Chambers has been contacted by the *Tonight Show* about an appearance, but who knows when she'll find the time? Along with preparing a fanfare for 30 trumpets for an environmental group, she's planning to make a film triptych of a hot-air balloon fiesta in New Mexico and then compose a score to be performed by a live orchestra.

She considers a loss of \$500 "a bargain" and finances herself with grants and video-production work. What is her motivation, if not money? "I like active things, and my music is very aggressive. The scale I do things on gives me the power to really grab people. People do not take me seriously at first, but when they do, they pop into another gear."

The inspiration for Chambers' orchestral manoeuvres in the park come in a dream: "I was hearing an incredible symphony with these massive, beautiful chords, totally sustained and gradually shifting into other chords. As I woke up, I realized I was hearing a huge traffic jam on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway."

—Susan Borey



Reach for Black & White

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## If they hadn't scored a hit with Communication Breakdown, Doppelganger might be selling illegal weapons in Tibet.

It's 2:30 in the afternoon. Doppelganger guitarist Randy Fredrix is standing in line at the bank. He's carrying a copy of "Communication Breakdown," his and keyboard player Philippe Saisse's first release, a street-rhythm-based dance song composed of hip-hop sounds.

Randy is trying to open a bank account, and he has brought the record as his only means of identification; everything else recently was stolen. The bank refuses to accept it. "This is the most low-tech thing," he complains. "I mean, I can go out on the street and buy a fake I.D. for \$50, but I can't buy a record with my face on it."

Do you go everywhere in your makeup?

RANDY: Oh, yeah.

PHILIPPE: He wears it all the time.

To the beach?

RANDY: Oh, yeah. To church. How did a blues guitarist from Chicago and a classically trained pianist from Paris get together and decide to play hip-hop? Most hip-hop comes from the ghetto—it's something blacks are saying about their lifestyle. It seems unlikely that either of you have had these experiences.

PHILIPPE: We haven't.

Growing up in Paris, I missed out on all the rock and roll that was happening in America. But I feel like I'm a part of hip-hop, because I'm in New York.

RANDY: Hip-hop is to me, to us, what rock and roll always was. It's heavily black, the whole rhythm and foundation, but rock and roll was also rooted in black influences. Although you call it hip-hop, your music does have a distinct style. Is it the addition of the hard-rock guitar that makes it different?

RANDY: Run-DMC does it. They don't sound like us, but they married rap with hard-driving guitar. And when they did it, I was glad, because they set a precedent for what we're doing.

So what you did was fuse a heavy street beat and rap with electronic music.

RANDY: Yes, but we don't



Doppelganger—Randy Fredrix (left) and Philippe Saisse.

really rap. No one is going to come along and outdo what those guys are doing. No white kid, not anyone. With so much music relying on the synthesizer, why do you use a guitar? Why not just create electronic guitar sounds?

RANDY: A machine can imitate a guitar sound, but it's never a real guitar sound. What's missing is the human touch. You just can't get the skin and strength on a synthesizer.

So why not have a drummer? Why use a drum machine?

PHILIPPE: It's a lot easier to deal with computer drums when you are creating a dance song, because you can have the drum play for hours until you find the sound you want. There is no way a guy will just bash on a drum like that while you say, "OK, can you play that again?"

Does this mean you will only do studio work?

PHILIPPE: No, we will play live.

What will you do for a drummer?

PHILIPPE: Use the computer to create one.

How do you define success?

PHILIPPE: It changes every

day. Because of your evolution as a human being, whatever satisfies you today is going to be different tomorrow.

The day Chaka Khan's record came out—I had written and played on two of the songs—it was an achievement. I thought playing on "I Feel for You" was successful the day I first heard it on the radio. But the next day, you set different goals.

What would you do if you weren't doing this?

PHILIPPE: Sell illegal weapons in Tibet.

RANDY: I've gone over it a million times, because I was suffering and starving year after year. What else could I have done? The answer is "Nothing."

Was it worth it?

RANDY: Suffering is a part of life no matter what you do. You're going to suffer, and you're going to have a good time. So you might as well choose what you're going to suffer for.

If you couldn't live in New York, where would you live?

RANDY: Heaven.

—Joanna Lissanti and  
Annette Sbarra

## Behind the Scenes

Part 1: Rock criticism's 10 favorite clichés:

1. eponymously titled
2. seminal influence
3. vinyl debut
4. rock scribb
5. scorching axe work (UK)
6. blistering fretwork (US)
7. wailing sax
8. throbbing bass
9. driving rhythms
10. legendary blues giant

## Yakety Yak

I can beat up anybody, and I can walk and talk at the same time.

—Hulk Hogan

(Printed as evidence)

We're not the type of band that attracts people like Farrah Fawcett backstage to our shows. That's too bad for Farrah; we could probably show her the time of her life.

—Nikki Sixx of Motley Crue

I used to jog, but the ice kept falling out of my glass.

—David Lee Roth



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# 7 WISHES

## 7 WISHES

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## We ask— someone had to— does the world need another hip-hop movie?

Does the world need another hip-hop movie? Especially one titled *Krush Groove*, directed by Michael (Car Wash) Schultz?

This one's got fly girl Sheila E., who raps on the theme song along with Kurtis Blow, Run-DMC, and The Fat Boys. The plot is loosely based on the real-life dormitory drama of Def Jam, the record company founded by Russell Simmons and New York University student Rick Rubin—that brought you The Beastie Boys. Rick makes his acting debut playing his Puma-wearing self. The other actors who are fixtures of the rap scene have roles not unlike their real persons.

The movie's homeboy entrepreneurs start a record label called *Krush Groove* and become indebted to loan sharks in the process. Sheila E. is the focus of a love triangle involving Run of Run-DMC and label co-owner Russell Wright, the fictional counterpart to Def Jam's Russell Simmons. Though the story is threaded with B-boy in-jokes (one scene reputedly depicts Run ironing his shoelaces), there's a threat that the glittery presence of Sheila E. could diffuse *Krush Groove's* street-level objectivity. But Fargur believes that her star allure will win over a wider audience: "It's all about giving what

these kids do a mainstream outlet."

The soundtrack album is due out on Warner Brothers Records in late summer to coincide with the movie's release. It will feature cuts by

The Gap Band, Chaka Khan, New Edition, The Beastie Boys, and LL Cool J, as well as Sheila E., Run-DMC, and The Fat Boys.

—Sue Cummings



Josh Charles



Josh Charles

## World Beat

It appears as if EMI has abandoned the Melody Makers' first LP, produced by Culture Club's Steve Levine, in favor of a new project placing Bob's 16-year-old son, Ziggy Marley, firmly up front. Work is now progressing on a second LP's worth of material in Kingston's Tuff Gong Studios, with Wailers' keyboardist Tyrone Downie at the production helm. . . . Downie will be extra busy this summer, sitting in with Steel Pulse on its U.S. tour. Pulse's new album, "Babylon the Bandit," should be in the shops shortly. . . . David Kulik, whose reggae compositions have been big sellers, has relocated from Holland and France, has embarked on one of the most interesting projects of the year. Recording at his own Ground Control studio in Santa Monica, Kulik has cut versions of his songs performed by a superstar parade of J.A.'s top vocalists, including Joe Higgs, Dennis Brown, Freddie McGregor, Don Carlos, and Gregory Isaacs. . . . With fewer American distributors handling essential Jamaican 7-inches these days and more people interested in reggae's history, a collectors' market is taking shape, much the way the doo-wop and blues markets developed. Two great sources for the hard-to-find singles are Nighthawk and Crucial Riddims, both of whom publish irregular catalogs of scarce records. Nighthawk's prices can be steep—from \$2 to \$40 on some items—and it is often the only place such material can be found. Write to Nighthawk Records, P.O. Box 15856, St. Louis, MO 63114. The two dawabs who run Crucial Riddims keep their prices at an average of \$3, and they have made exhaustive searches of the island's back rooms and warehouses to unearth real treasures. Reach them at 24250 Relief Hill Road, Nevada City, CA 95959. . . . The first Sunsplash tour of the U.S. proved to be a success on the coast but the victim of circumstances on many of its midwestern dates. Still, a total of 35 dates were played, including jammed shows at Radio City, D.C.'s Convention Center, and L.A.'s Greek Theatre. At this writing, *Splash* planned to play

(Top) Blair Underwood, who plays Russell Wright; (middle) Run-DMC; (bottom) The Fat Boys.

London's Crystal Palace in June, then go to 14 other European cities, play the eighth annual Sunsplash Festival in Montego Bay Aug. 14-18, cross the Pacific to Japan in late August, then tour the U.S. again, with a new lineup, beginning in September. . . . Mutabaruka is about to publish a new volume of poetry, his first in years, before returning to work on his third album. . . . In California recently, Linton Kwesi Johnson found Johnny Rotten in his L.A. audience and an ironic coincidence on his impromptu visit to U.C.-Berkeley's once-tempestuous campus. Crossing Sproul Plaza, he anti-apartheid protesters the morning, he looked up in surprise as students began to unfurl a gigantic banner bearing a line from his most recent album: "It is no mystery/we're making history!" Obviously buoyed by the impact of his words on people 6,000 miles from home, LKJ flew back to London to contemplate writing new works with broader themes, particularly regarding South Africa. . . . Till such time—Jah Love.

—Roger Steffens

## Dancing to the Beat of a Different Drummer

Tommy Boy records has come up with the ultimate do-it-yourself rap package. The album *Masters of the Beat*, due in late July, is a compilation of naked beats, each programmed on a drum machine by a different producer. Executive producer Tom Silverman chose the streetwise rhythm donors (Rick Rubin, Whiz Kid, the Latin Rascals, Keith LeBlanc) for their demonstrated ability to provide the "essence of what the kids go on." Since there are no songwriters, royalties are minimal and a percentage of the publishing profits will be donated to New York City's Coalition for the Homeless. Tommy Boy predicts that DJs will buy the prepackaged tracks for instant cutting into their own mixes; rappers will use the ready-made backing to rehearse; and hard-core B-boys and girls might just like a beat that's "heat n eat."

—Sue Cummings



Photo: G. G.

## Is the psychedelic revival a magical mystery bore? The Meat Puppets say 'no'. Meet the Meat Puppets.

Billie Holiday, it was said, sang "as if her feet hurt." Curt Kirkwood, lead singer of the Meat Puppets, also sings as if his feet hurt. Perhaps it is because his new cowboy boots pinch. Fashioned from unrelenting iguana skin and acquired in Mexico, the boots sit on the floor of the dressing room in New York's Peppermint Lounge. Rising from their cramped reptilian depths are two impossibly long legs that eventually culminate in a face wreathed in pre-Raphaelite ringlets. Kirkwood's gaze is filtered by nerdy spectacles. A cowboy without a cow?

It is very late; 3 AM or so. The Meat Puppets have just finished a long and indifferent set. The audience was made up of less-than-stylish inhabitants of Manhattan's outer boroughs. The thinking man, who you expect to see turn out for this thinking-of-thinking-man's rock and roll bands, is absent. In vain one looks for members of that fabulously weedy, long-haired, scrofulous, bespectacled, but absurd, plaid-shirted breed that nod so knowingly for their favorite groups. They know the secrets of the deep after all; perhaps that is why they look as if they live underwater. There are,

to be sure, one or two of them in evidence. But the Meat Puppets deserve a legion. Where are the Dead Heads? Where are the Talking Heads? Where are the blackheads? It is a mystery.

Another mystery is the Meat Puppets' music. I call it "prairie psychedelia." The prairie part comes in the arid, spooky, and countrified elements of their sound. Emptiness whips and whines about their songs. There is a solitary, inverted quality, too; dust gets in your eyes and throat. You wish you hadn't wandered out so far, you wish you were home, then you realize you are home. Is that someone at the door? A serial killer perhaps? Oh sure, there are cheerful elements in the music. Sometimes it sounds like a jamboree, but a phosphorous one taking place in snake country. If these guys were to play Nashville, they'd be phantoms of the Opry. The place would empty in a nanosecond.

Psychedelic? Good question. The Meat Puppets' lyrics, all written by the elongated Kirkwood, conjure a reality that is distinct and consistent but, by any ordinary measure, makes no sense whatsoever. An example from Meat Puppets #2, the second of their three

albums: "Many hands began to scan around for the next plateau/Some said it was grazing land and some said Mexico/Others decided it was nowhere 'ceptin' where they stood/But those were all just guesses/Wouldn't help if they could."

Now is everything clear? Contradictions dissolve in the psychedelic experience. Listening to their new (third) album, *Up on the Sun*, you wonder whether you're on fire or freezing to death. Have we seized on the great Truth or gone mad? Let's jump out the window and find out! The Meat Puppets incorporate such seeming contradictions in their music as well as in their lyrics. The band's hardcore past rattles beneath the surface of an almost folksy ingenuousness. Is the music sinister or cozy, flippant or deadly serious? Contradictions dissolve on contact with the Meat Puppets.

Getting straight answers from Curt Kirkwood is uphill work. It would be uphill work even in the group's hometown of Phoenix, Arizona, where, presumably, there are no hills. When asked to describe his music, he declines. "You're the journalist. You're the one who's supposed to pigeonhole it." How, then, do other

Meat Puppets (L-R) Chris Kirkwood, Derrick Bostrom and Curt Kirkwood.

people describe it? "Garbage, drone, bullshit, phenomena, miracles of Christ," he replies wearily. "There's millions of names for it."

And does he take drugs, psychadelics? "Oxygen. I'm as hip as the next guy." And the prairie, surely an influence in his music? He stares into nowhere. "Not really."

Keep trying. I ask him his favorite groups. A long pause this time. "I like group A as opposed to group B." Not to panic. Favorite subject in high school? The question hangs. "Bell." And what does he read? "I don't read," replies Curt Kirkwood.

I try another angle. Does he believe in ghosts? Kirkwood flinches. "I'm talking to one right now." (I knew I'd been feeling run-down!) He adds, "We're all dead already. We're spiritual ghosts talking to each other." I ask him how he found this out. "Because I'm one of the bourgeoisie. I'm already a rich man," he answers. That's how you found out we're all dead? "Yeah. You might say I bought the information."

—Fayette Hickox



## KING OF THE ROAD

Billy Bragg makes music for the masses, but he wins his fans one at a time.

Article by Sue Cummings

**B**illy Bragg and I are backstage juggling record-industry jargon. "MOR, AOR . . . I can't even remember what they all stand for," he mumbles with a Cockney inflection of disgust.

"You're sort of like DOR—denim-oriented rock," I tease.

"What, these?" He points to his faded jeans. "I just wear them 'cause they only cost me £6.50." Now he's indignant. If this were a cartoon, the thought-bubble over his head would read, "These bloody journalists . . ." But he doesn't say that. I'm a girl, and he's too polite.

He rummages through his knapsack and shoves a guitar pick into his back pocket. The dressing room has no mirror. On the way downstairs to the stage, he

asks, "How do I look? Is this all right for playing a gig in New York?" As he straightens an imaginary collar above his plain white T-shirt, his voice is deadpan, but sarcasm flashes across his face.

To the initiated, Billy Bragg is already something of a new-age minstrel. In a country as small as England, the impact of his live performances garnered a feature in *Melody Maker* in the spring of 1983, even before the release of his first LP, *Life's a Riot With Spy vs. Spy*, on the independent Go! Discs label, has to date sold more than 110,000 copies in England. But it's not unusual for indies to climb the charts there, and though *Life's a Riot* went Top 20, cynics might think that English youth would buy Bragg's sin-

cerity even if it were hype.

But Bragg is a man of words and deeds. First the words: "The entire business is run on bullshit, as much in England as in America, but you don't have to fuckin' go up to your neck and eat it as well. With a bit of thought, you can sort of paddle across it. And if you're really gonna be a media Jesus, actually walking on the bullshit is the ultimate challenge. What enables you? Street credibility."

Bragg spent most of 1982 traveling around Britain with an electric guitar, honing his repertoire in pubs ("Cause I didn't have enough songs, I relied more on smart-ass one-liners"). Chappell Music donated three afternoons of studio time to him in 1983. The resulting low-budget demo, recorded live onto two tracks with only vocals and guitar, subsequently became *Life's a Riot*. When his second LP, *Brewing Up With Billy Bragg*, was released in America on CD Presents last year, he branded it with the "Pay no more than" warning of his first recording. "It doesn't cost me a lot to make these records, so I don't see why consumers should have to pay that much for them."

He has also refused, under pressure, to form a band, make a video, or release a single. Paradoxically, his songs' quirky wit makes them prime singles prospects. Bragg has discovered that when you play a wild card, the singles game is not without its share of ironies: "Kirsty McColl covered 'New England,' and for the price of that 12-inch you could get the whole LP [*Life's a Riot*] with the original on it. So people started buying it again, and it went back into the Top 30. When people see an LP for £2.99, they don't mind taking a chance on it. I believe it's a rip-off to make an LP for £2.99 and lift a single off it for £1.70."

But a record is only the next best thing to being there. A tireless performer, Bragg played a gig in a different city almost every night of his six-week American tour this spring. The absence of a band means greater mobility, as his entourage consists of manager Pete Jenner and one roadie.

I know why I do it, and it's not nothing to do with food, stadium videos, and Grammys awards. It's much more fun just sitting in the back of a car with the guitar and amp driving around, meeting people. It's about a need to communicate my ideas to people—the absolute bottom line—and a need to travel. I really enjoy doing gigs. It scares me, 'cause I like it."

For a man who began his career in a punk band, Bragg has carved an unlikely niche as a busker with a social conscience and an electric guitar. "A whole generation's grown up without ever hearing records without bass and drums. They've never heard Woody Guthrie or those first two Bob Dylan LPs; to them it's all really new. To me it's not new 'cause I've worked my way back that far." But Bragg doesn't restrict himself to the folk tradition; a session as guest DJ at WNYU, a college station in New York, found him playing the Redskins, *Die Toten Hosen*, R.E.M., "I Stand for 'Really Excellent Men,'" *Microdisney*, the Kinks, and Sam Cooke's *Live at Harlem Square Club*. His own records owe as much to Paul Weller as to any whole-grain folkie; they offer the immediacy of punk tempered with a wariness of its self-serving excess.

"I wouldn't say I'm reinterpreting the ideas of someone like Dylan. I'm learning from the failures of the sort of turn on, tune in, and freak out generation that failed miserably, as did punk rock. In the end it all became just about buying records, haircuts, clothes, and drugs. It went from confronting the issues and spilled over into nihilism and decadence."

"When I first thought about playing again [after the breakup of his punk band Kiff Raff in 1977], I realized that the most intense way would be to strip it right down but still play fast and loud. I couldn't do it with acoustic guitar—I had to have that scathing edge. I didn't want to play folk clubs and be the new James Taylor. I still secretly wanted to be The Clash."

It's not a secret anymore.

His political convictions are out in the open as well. Earlier this year, during his jobs for Youth tour in England, kids found Labour Party MPs in attendance after the shows to press the flesh and address social grievances—unemployment, racism, the miners' strike. "Revolutions do not start in record shops. But if you write a song like 'Between the Wars,' you have to come up with the actions to meet it. I don't claim that the Labour Party has all the answers in the U.K., but they took the youth vote for granted in the last election and didn't get it. I do think that at the moment they offer a better opportunity for an egalitarian society than anybody else."

How will this banner-waving translate to American audiences? Slowly. Rather than belligerently point his middle finger at the music biz, Bragg has simply charted a course as an entertainer that rarely intersects with standard media channels. "What I do is best expressed person-to-person; it's a two-way thing. At a gig you have the opportunity to question what I'm saying. When I write a song, I try to put you in the song's context. To make a video starring me would cross purposes."

This has caused some confusion. "There was a great thing on Channel 5 News about me and Prince. It showed me walking around playing the guitar and cut to the 'When Doves Cry' video. And the guy said, 'What do all these young men have in common?' Apparently, we were both 'new' music. The definition of new music was: You're under 25, make videos, and use all the new technology. Unfortunately, I failed on all three of those—it's a real pity."

"I'm still not sure who my audience is. I have a terrible feeling they might be yuppies."

After the show, the publicist gestures wildly to me and whispers: "That's Bob Dylan's son over there, the one with the dark hair. He came to see Billy play. They're good friends."

I inch my way through the crowd toward Jesse Dylan. I don't know what to say. Finally I ask, "Have you got a cigarette?" Bob Dylan's son doesn't smoke.

A month later, word reaches New York that The Clash are busking in northern England without their roadies, doing acoustic sets in pubs, clubs, and shopping centers. In Leeds, they perform for a crowd standing in line for tickets to see The Alarm.

It is May, and Billy Bragg is touring Canada.

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Antennae Overall

# BUBBLIN' CRUDE

Article by Bill Wolfe

You say times are tough  
We've got the best of both worlds here  
Things are rough  
We've got the best of both worlds here.

—“Best of Both Worlds”

Dressed in khaki fatigues and an old sweater, his trademark bald head covered with a knit cap, Peter Garrett seems out of his element here in his American manager's posh Beverly Hills office.

Garrett's imposing 6-foot 5-inch frame and ferocious stage manner can create an intimidating image, but now, talking quietly, he appears ready to jump up and bolt out of the office any moment. But he still manages to intimidate: as soon as he opens his mouth, his considerable self-assurance and strange equine grace return; he is himself again, no longer distracted by his environment. Los Angeles is not one of Garrett's favorite cities.

“I think there's a great deal of evil in this city,” he says coolly. “I'm happier at home.”

It's no wonder that Garrett would rather be back in Sydney, Australia. Midnight Oil is undisputed champion there, the country's most popular and influential band. Their last album, 1982's *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1*, saluted securely on the *Top 5* for six months and was still on the charts an unheard-of 95 weeks later when their latest album, *Red Sails in the Sunset*, was released last October, entering the charts at No. 2. What Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band are to America, Midnight Oil is to Australia.

But Midnight Oil has reached a crossroad. It has so completely conquered its homeland that little remains to accomplish there. Because the band thrives on chal-

lenge, its members have decided to expand internationally in order to avoid stagnation. Although *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1* was released in the United States during late 1983 to critical acclaim in the heavy alternative radio airplay, the group played only a few shows on a three-month U.S. tour in April 1984 before returning home to begin rehearsals for *Red Sails*. The Oils could be perfectly content to stay at home with their adoring audience were it not for the fact that like all sociopolitical artists, they want to express their views to as many people as possible; the challenge at this point is how to do so without compromising their vision or musical integrity. They may not care that much about overseas success, but they don't know what else to do. So despite their misgivings, they find themselves here in the belly of the vinyl beast.

Midnight Oil's drummer, 29-year-old Rob Hirst, displays none of Peter Garrett's cool, methodical offstage demeanor. He may share Garrett's intensity, but he is outgoing, and talkative and has a passion for horticulture and Australian and American history. With his dark, aquiline good looks and his swimmer's physique, Hirst is the most physically appealing member of this decidedly unsexy band. Attempting to clarify Garrett's hostile remarks, Hirst stresses that Midnight Oil is not so much anti-American as it is pro-Australia.

“In the past few years we've done a bit of traveling,” he says, the words flying out in bursts. “We spent most of our time overseas wishing we were back in Sydney. The song ‘Best of Both Worlds’ is about being in Sydney; it's about what we have. We went back and there were more strikes on and the New South Wales government was exploding with corruption, but it seemed that—despite all these things—what was going on overseas was far, far worse, and we should just get our act together there and realize what we've got.”

The Oils are fiercely proud of Australia, and that passion infuses their music with a haunting resonance. Their scathing analysis of the Australian historical, geo-

graphic, economic, and cultural condition is not meant to condemn so much as to inform, all in the hope of helping to save their country both from itself and from an outside world bent on sweeping up Australia on its coast toward nuclear destruction. However, listeners are not subjected to dry, self-important pontification; Midnight Oil backs its discourses with some of the most kinetic and distinctive music currently being played anywhere.

Midnight Oil is more or less led by the 31-year-old Garrett, a surfing fanatic, former college activist, and lawyer. Garrett, Hirst, and the three other Oils (guitarists Jim Moginie and Martin Rotsey and bassist Peter Gifford) had from Sydney's middle-class Northern Suburbs, where they first attracted a following among the surfing community from the nearby beaches. They solidified their huge, fanatical, pub-based constituency with their fourth album, *10, 9, 8, ...*. Considered an epochal record in Australia, it features references to nuclear brinkmanship, U.S. military and cultural imperialism, environmental destruction, and Australian apathy in such songs as “Power and the Passion,” “Read About It,” “U.S. Forces,” and “Short Memory.” The Oils' insistence on writing from an Australian point of view endeared them to Aussie punters craving a band they could call their own.

*Red Sails in the Sunset* topped the charts without the benefit of an advance single, a tour, or any advertising or publicity. And like its predecessor, *Red Sails* is a particularly Australian album.

“We're proud of that,” Hirst insists. “Typical Oils, really, on the verge of international success, and we make a record that only third-generation antipodeans can understand,” he adds, laughing. “We are Australians, so we write about the country we grew up in and the people we live with. The record is a valid contribution to contemporary Australian culture, even if culture is spelled with a capital K.”

Peter Garrett may be the center of attention in the



band, but Hirst and guitarist/keyboardist Jim Moginie write most of the songs, and it is largely Hirst's instincts that have led Midnight Oil to its current musical and lyrical diversity. "It's an album of experimentation," explains Garrett. "We tried to do a little bit more of what we started to do with 10, 9, 8 . . . , which was very sophisticated technological studio hardware with primitive sounds. And we wanted to have humor and variation on it, for it to be a little lighter. We didn't want it to be a doom-gloom nuclear bombs album."

Hirst and the Oils are equally preoccupied with aboriginal issues on *Red Sails*, as in the tempestuous protest song titled "Kosciusko." They were affected strongly by a 1984 visit to an aboriginal settlement in northwestern Queensland, where they gave a special outdoor concert, the first show by white performers ever witnessed by the natives. "Slow" and "surfer" aborigines who came into the cities and end up as unemployed alcoholics, often spending brutal nights in jail. The album's centerpiece is a jarringly 8-minute epic, "Jimmy Sharman's Boxers," a scalding attack on the exploitation of aborigines for sport. Hirst: "Sharman was a legend right up until 1971, when conditions for boxing became so rigid that people like him got obliterated from the boxing scene. My earliest remembrance of Sharman's tents is a depressing scene, with the big drum he used to beat madly resounding through the whole show, and 12, or 13 aboriginal boxers looking like the most tragic, pathetic human beings you'd ever seen standing up there in various states of disarray. They'd obviously had their faces remodeled several times. Sharman was yelling [Hirst affects a salty Ocker accent], 'Who'll go a round or two for a pound or two? Bring your knuckles to bear! Have a go with the boys!' That was his call-up, which appears at the beginning of the tune. I think it's a strong image not only of boxing, but also of those aboriginal boxers he'd drag down from southern Queensland to join the troupe. It seemed their only possibility for mobility was shows like these."

The nuclear imagery has been downplayed in *Red Sails*, though Midnight Oil's desire for disarmament appears in the chilling "Harrisburg" ("When the stuff gets in/You cannot get it out") and "Minutes to Midnight." Garrett recently took action in this area by running for the Australian senate late last year as a candidate from the fledgling Nuclear Disarmament Party, formed last summer by a Canberra doctor and Nobel Prize-winning novelist Patrick White, among others. Garrett's last-minute campaign attracted a lot of attention, and he garnered more than 10 percent of the popular vote.

"Initially there was a lot of skepticism," Garrett says of his candidacy. "We've got a different profile in Australia; we're a force to be reckoned with, but it's underground. A lot of these people had heard about Midnight Oil, but they just had this vision of me as this tall, silent, stoic sort of surfer who'd go up and down onstage. They fired these questions at me that they didn't think I could answer. I just fired right back at them, and that was it." He smiles, blue eyes blazing.

*Red Sails* was finally released in the U.S. in July after more than six months of haggling between Columbia Records and the group. It wasn't the album cover's "visual scandal" of a postapocalyptic Sydney, by photomontage artist Tsurehisa Kimura, that concerned the label, but the lack of potential hit singles for the American market. Despite the label's entreaties, the band steadfastly refused to re-enter the studio to record a few "more commercial" songs, telling Columbia to take *Red Sails* as it was or not at all. Columbia took it.

As always, the garrulous Hirst has the last word. "We bundled up the *Place Without a Postcard* album under our arms in 1981 and told A&M where to go if they didn't like our 'Australian' record. Just as that record company suggested that a few 'more international-sounding Top 10 hits' could perhaps be added to the *Postcard* album, so also is CBS grappling with the identity of 'Jimmy Sharman' and having trouble pronouncing 'Kosciusko.' So be it."



Top left and above: the inimitable and 6-foot, 5-inch Peter Garrett, lawyer, surfing fanatic, and lead singer of *Midnight Oil*.

Mark Hendrick

# The Beat Farmers: A Field Study

**B**etween thundering belches and complaints about the female anatomy, Country Dick of the Beat Farmers is trying to make a point: "People can feel that we really care about what we're doing. And they care. They start liking it because we're sincere."

Flashback to Saturday night. On one of his occasional excursions from behind the drums, Dick staggers around the stage, sloshing back and forth, crusty Stevie Ray Vaughan-style, crusty. Overweight, bearded, and jewellily rosecate, a vulgar debasement of a frontier minstrel, he begins to croak in his bullfrog bass the ratnchy and hapless tale of the "California Kid." Plunging gracefully into the appalled but supportive audience, he flings his full can of beer into the air, spattering all in the vicinity with the foamy greatness of unringed rock and roll. He catches the can in one hand. "Listen up, scumbags," he commands. "This is the best part of the song. This is where I get laid."

This is sincerity?

The gory details of the sordid consumption dispensed, Dick returns to his drum throne, where he proceeds to kick a hard, direct beat for singer/guitarists Jerry Raney and Buddy Blue. The band steadies its keel and dig into a rush of sweaty, roots-drenched rock and roll, trashing songs from the new *tales of the New West* album as well as a more corderoed ramble. As Rock 'n' Roll's pungent Doc Pomus-style eighth notes on the bass and Raney and Blue blai! at their strings, the set becomes a heated race to the finish line—winner gets all the beer. Country, blues, and rockabilly influences melt into the torrid momentum of the insistent beat. Allowing for some rude irreverence, it's a good old American time. Sincere? Hell! these guys are downright earnest.

The Beat Farmers are one of those bands. You know the ones. They love dead American musical traditions and hate all things British; they believe string ties and d.a.'s and electric guitars communicate more authentically than space

suits and decorous coils and synthesizers. And they labor under the delusion that they alone make music that's real.

Especially Buddy Blue. He may wear a silly cowboy shirt and a greaser haircut, but he's one serious hombre. "We're Americans," he says, clearing any lingering doubts. "This is what we were brought up with. This is what we listen to. We didn't say, 'We're going to be a roots band.' We're just doing what comes naturally to us. It's sincere. It's not just set out there as a product, like a McDonald's hamburger."

As far as the Beat Farmers' peers in the roots anti-trend are concerned, Blue takes an equally hard line. "We were doing this before most of them even thought about it. I'm not talking about the Beat Farmers per se. He [Country Dick] had a band called Country Dick, and the Snuggle Bunnies years ago that was doing more or less what we're doing now. I was playing with an old black guy called Tomcat, doing nothing but blues. And he [Raney] did some work with Chuck Berry. I hate

it when they make us sound like Johnny-come-latelys jumping on the roots bandwagon."

"I just wondering why all these other bands have copied us," ejaculates Raney. He, at 36, is the band's senior by 10 years and Country Dick's by 15. Country Dick will reveal neither his age nor his true identity. Raney's plaintive drawl is the most evocative of the band's three voices, and his reading of the nostalgic "Bigger Stones," about the disillusioning loss of youth, is the most moving part of the Beat Farmers' set. He's also the band's offstage clown. Throughout our conversation, he addresses virtually no comments to the point, continually expressing his hatred for everything, including the guys in the band, and challenging Wham! and everyone else in the world to a Mexican death match. "Each guy gets a rope tied around his wrist, and you wrestle without a referee until someone's dead. You can choke the other guy, give him hickies or pink bellies. If I was in a Mexican death match with anyone from Wham!, they'd

Article by John Leland





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# We Are The World.

really be sorry."

Their willingness to mix coarse with solemn tradition is the key to the Beat Farmers' music. They aren't purists. "We're not hillbillies," says Dick. "We're not old and black. But we like all that stuff. We just suck it in and spit it out. It's a natural bastardization." According to Blue, impurity is a goal: "If we can take a little bit of everything we like and mix it in there and have people see that, then we're successful."

Their mixture includes a hearty helping of crudity. The band lives by the credo "dumb, fat, and drunk is no way to go through life." Onstage, as Dick stumbles through the disarmingly idiotic "Happy Boy," Raney tunelessly gurgles a mouthful of Bud in virtuous support. Throughout the set, Blue forswakes his axe for a cheap kazoo. And for all their deep-seated earnestness, they close their show with an a cappella Led Zeppelin medley, during which Raney, Blue, and Dexter balance the letters LSD on their heads.

In their hometown of San Diego, they get even looser—and straighter. In the great tradition of bar bands, they churn out three sets a night, four nights a week. "On any given night," says Blue, "in the same room there's cowboys, punks, bikers, college students, preppies. We get real live hardcore toothless cowboys that are actually out there raising cattle. And we'll do real traditional country, real traditional blues, and real dirty shit." Says Dick, perpetrator of most of the real dirty lyrics, "We deal a lot in spontaneity. When you do that, anything that comes off the top of your head goes into the crowd. You lose a few people. Some have to be sacrificed."

For now, though, the Beat Farmers are on the road. Their record company, Rhino, offers moral support and warns local press along the band's itinerary of its arrival. But basically, the boys are on their own. Without commercial airplay, they rely on college radio and word of mouth to fill their shows—about five of 'em a week. Sometimes, as in Salt Lake City, where the Farmers' antics were met with apathy and Mormon disgust, it doesn't work.

The road, as countless numbers of the

band's idols have long since discovered, is a hard mistress. "We've been on the road for five weeks now," Dick tells the Saturday night audience, "and I can testify that the Beat Farmers give the worst hard jobs in the business." The constants of the tour are long drives, short periods of sleep, and—all chime in at once—bad sex."

But their van, a rebuilt '68 GMC named Plowboy, is "peeling out," according to Raney, and they're actually making money. "We're doing fine for our first time out," says Dick. "We've got a whole new batch of hardcore Beat Farmer people that are going to be with us for a long time. We're appealing to people who aren't the pretties, the people that are always going to be there and are always going to buy our records. The influences that we have are lasting influences, classics. All we're trying to do is strive toward that ourselves."

Blue, naturally, takes Dick's long-term view even farther. "I don't think we're going to sound dated at all in 10 years. When you listen to Creedence and The Band, people who had the same ideals we do, they sound a lot less dated than people who were on some trend of the day. I don't think you're going to be able to place the Beat Farmers and say, 'This is a mid-'80s sound.'"

Obviously, the Beat Farmers have high hopes. But the rock-and-roll pantheon is built on the backs of musicians who harbored such vainglorious delusions. What if these sincere guys, who refuse to acknowledge pop music's most basic ideological premise and their tacit complicity in it, can't crack the major markets they so desperately want to reach? Dick becomes somber and resigned. "If this band can't make it, screw it. If you can't put together people that you have a lot of confidence in, with true abilities, a lot of variety, and sincerity—if that can't make it, then you're going to have to do something like Billy Idol. And we aren't going to do that."

Meet the Beat Farmers (L to R): Rolle, Dexter, Jerry Raney, Country Dick, and Buddy Blue.



Photo by Gary Leonard



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# The Portable Leonard Cohen

Article by Scott Cohen

**L**eonard Cohen's sweetheart is an olive-green Olivetti 22 portable typewriter with black keys and white letters, which he bought in London in 1959 for £40. It's the same model, chosen for its design, as the one on display in the Smithsonian, although Leonard has removed part of the case on his so he can see the keys inside. On it, Leonard types a sad song. A very gloomy, depressing song about a broken heart. It's always the same song, whether it's a lyric, poem, or novel. In 26 years, his Olivetti broke only once.

One winter day in Montreal in 1964, Cohen drew a bath and put some pine oil in it. When Leonard Cohen types, he likes to be clean. He likes his floors washed, his table tidy, his bed made. The pine oil stained his bath the same color as his Olivetti. Being in a mood of some extravagance, Leonard threw the typewriter into the bath and tried to type underwater. He threw the manuscript for his book of poems, *Flowers For Hitler*, into the tub and scrubbed it with a nail brush. Then he took the Olivetti out of the tub and, in a rage over some imagined injustice a woman had done to him, flung it across the room. It was a small room in a small house he rented on, coincidentally, Pine Avenue. The back of the carriage, which is metal and the most solid part of the typewriter, cracked, keys sticking out all over the place. Leonard Cohen was sure it was over for the Olivetti.

In the days of remorse that followed, Leonard took his typewriter to the Olivetti factory on Nun's Island. A man in the repair department took one look at it, shook his head, and laughed.

Leonard Cohen doesn't know why, but when the repairman turned his back, he walked into the factory toward an old man working on some typewriters at his bench and said, "I really need this typewriter." The old man looked at the typewriter and said it was possible he could fix it. A few days later, Leonard

returned to the factory, and the Olivetti had been meticulously repaired. Leonard paid the man a few dollars and went on to type all his famous songs—"Suzanne," "So Long Marianne," "Famous Blue Raincoat," "Sisters of Mercy"; his best-selling novel, *Beautiful Losers*; and his other masterpieces.

Leonard, why do you sing such a sad song? "It isn't that I choose to. This is what I am." Seriousness, rather than depression, is, he thinks, characteristic of his work. "I like a good laugh, but I think there's an enjoyment that comes through seriousness, that the heart has an appetite for seriousness. We all know when you close the door and come into your room and you're left with your heart and your emotions, it isn't all that funny."

Leonard Cohen's life is like his songs. The "I" in his songs, by and large, is him. So is the "you," when it isn't the woman in the song who broke his heart. And the woman in his life is the woman in his songs. It's hard to say where the women leave their corporeal boundaries and move into his, and vice versa.

Leonard Cohen's typing is influenced by liturgical, country, and folk music. Leonard Cohen types like a flamenco dancer. Folk music led Leonard Cohen to Spanish flamenco guitar playing, which led him to Lorca, his first favorite poet, after whom he named his first daughter, Lorca Cohen recently asked her father if she could change her name.

Leonard Cohen types very slowly at the beginning and works up a head of steam. Leonard Cohen types the way he writes, one word at a time, unlike Hank Williams, the master of the sad song, who could knock one out in the back seat of a taxi.

After he wrote *Beautiful Losers*, Leonard Cohen took his Olivetti to Greece, where he had bought a house for \$1,500. *Beautiful Losers* got great reviews but only sold 3,000 copies in hard cover—not enough to live on in Canada. He could live in Greece

Photography by Steve Tynan





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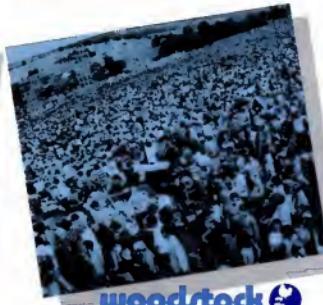
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for less than \$1,000 a month. About five years later, his novel sold millions of copies in paperback.

While writing *Beautiful Losers*, Leonard Cohen listened to a lot of country music and Ray Charles on the radio. On his way to Nashville to become a country singer, he stopped in New York to check the scene. Danny Fields introduced him to Edie Sedgwick, a beautiful young heiress and Andy Warhol superstar who later killed herself. Danny Fields took him to the Dom, the hottest disco in the world, where Lou Reed walked up to Leonard with a copy of "Flowers For Hitler" and asked him to sign it. Another night, Leonard and Lou Reed were in the back room of Max's Kansas City, and some guy was provoking Leonard. Lou Reed said to Leonard, "Man, you don't have to take that kind of shit. You wrote *Beautiful Losers*."

Leonard got his start when an influential person in the record industry who knew him as a Canadian poet took him to New York, where he met various people in the business who said, "Stand up, kid. Aren't you a little too old for this?" Leonard was about 33; he couldn't pay his grocery bills, couldn't pay his rent, and had a woman and child to support. Finally, he was introduced to Judy Collins, who then was a star in the circles he respected. A few months later he wrote "Suzanne," called Judy Collins, and sang it to her over the phone. Judy Collins recorded it, which gave Leonard a certain validity, and then it was arranged for him to meet John Hammond of Columbia Records, who signed Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Bruce Springsteen, among others. Hammond went to Leonard's room at the Chelsea Hotel, where Edie Sedgwick, Tennessee Williams, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Sam Shepard, and everybody weird and arty stayed in the 1960s. Hammond asked, "What songs do you have?" Leonard picked up his guitar and sang them; one song, two songs, five songs, twelve songs, fifteen songs. Hammond immediately signed him.

Leonard Cohen went to Hollywood in 1967 to score a film. It was the first time anyone had paid his way across the continent and put him up in a hotel. They even put his name on the matchboxes. Then they showed him the film, but he couldn't relate to it.

Leonard Cohen's songs starred, along with Julie Christie and Warren Beatty, in Robert Altman's *M McCabe and Mrs. Miller*: a beautiful but depressing movie.

"Songs From a Room" and "Song of Love And Hate" were typed in Tennessee, where Leonard Cohen lived on 1,500 acres he rented for \$75 from Boudleaux Bryant, who wrote "I'm Looking Over a Four-Leaf Clover" and "Bye-Bye, Love."

Leonard hated "Death of a Lady's Man." He wrote it in Los Angeles in 1976. Leonard says Phil Spector, who produced it, confiscated the tapes under armed guard and mixed them in secret. Cohen didn't like the mix, because a lot of the vocals were either first takes or guide vocals for the band. Cohen's options were to either hire his own army and fight it out with Spector outside Gold Star Records on Santa Monica Boulevard, or let it go.

The Olivetti did not go with him to New Mexico a few summers ago when he checked into a Zen monastery. There was no time for serious typing. He had met an 80-year-old Zen master in L.A. at a friend's wedding. One of the marriage vows was not to become intoxicated. Then they broke out the sake, and the bride and groom had to drink seven glasses in a row.

A few months later, Leonard Cohen got into trouble—"the trouble," he says, "that we all embrace, but can't name." Leonard went to the Zen master's retreat in New Mexico and stayed the better part of a month. "It was too rigorous for me. The master was Japanese and there was no English, and I'd find myself walking around in the snow at night wearing sandals as part of the walking meditation, and thought this was the revenge of the Second World War. Then I got all these idealistic American kids and were torturing them." Leonard went over the wall, but a couple of things lingered with him, and he went back. "It's a deep sense of doubt that drives you into the meditation hall, and often it's a self you discover and can't stand, which is

why you drop it."

The Olivetti did not go with him to New York this last time around, when he went to see Walter Yetnikoff, president of Columbia Records. Columbia distributes Leonard Cohen's albums in Europe and Canada, where he is famous. All his records go gold—though it might take four or five years. Europeans, like country fans, stick with their heroes. Every year there's a Leonard Cohen Festival in Krakow, Poland, where all they play is Leonard Cohen.

After reviewing Leonard's dark, double-breasted suit, Walter Yetnikoff said, "Leonard, we know you're great, but we don't know if you are any good," and turned down *Various Positions*, Cohen's new album, because it wasn't contemporary.

Leonard Cohen's new songs sound older than his old songs. Why, Leonard, do you sing the same old song? "I don't think anybody changes. Of course, there are elaborations and changes in technology, but I think any artist—writer, singer, painter—has only one or two paintings that he does over and over."

Leonard Cohen is part of a tradition involving, as he puts it, certain men who, with a sense of shame or a sense of triumph or just the honor of survival, have

### *"It isn't that I choose to sing a sad song. This is what I am."*

spoken about their condition, sometimes in a modest way, sometimes in an ironic way, sometimes in a shameless way, according to their natures. This tradition goes back to Job, Isaiah, Solomon, and earlier. Leonard Cohen feels close to those men. He is those men. He is the same man who stood up and made those prophetic, ridiculous, ironic declarations about feelings concerning women; mostly concerning women, because that's what Leonard Cohen is here for.

Curiously, Leonard, 50, is acknowledged as an influence or mentor to such unlikely contemporary bands as *Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel*, *Nick Cave, The The, Joy Division, Sisters of Mercy, the Flying Lizards*, and *Ruin*. They give him their records and he listens: "When I first heard Nick Cave's version of 'Avadance,' I thought his instincts were impeccable for taking the song and tearing it apart. On this new album by *Ruin*, they sing the first verse of the Master song more or less as I sing it, but then they bring this world to it of every sound



you ever heard and murder it, but as it should be murdered. It's a clean killing. Jim Foetus I think feels some kind of kindred spirit with me. It's writing from the deepest place he can locate. One song he wrote is 'My Gums Bleed For You.'"

Leonard considers himself a minor writer, one whose promise is small but who explores it very thoroughly. "You know whether you're a high jumper or not. I know that in a sense I'm a long-distance runner. I'm not going to win any sprints. I'm not going to win any high jumps or anything spectacular. I may hang in there if my health remains good, and I will explore this tiny vision."

Counting all his songs, poems, novels, and other works, Cohen has typed more than a million words on his Olivetti. The Olivetti people should send him a gold typewriter, and he should donate his Olivetti to the Leonard Cohen Museum in Poland, now that he's getting an Apple computer.



The Knitters, Talking Heads, Woodstock, Burning Spear, Dire Straits, Cameo, Leroi Brothers, Allan Holdsworth, Midnight Oil.

# SPINS



Mark L. Davis

## Platter du Jour

### The Knitters

Poor Little Critter on the Road  
Slash



Is there elbow room? Twixt hokum and kitsch, and what distinguishes the two? What is it when: a) Hank Williams leans over the Opry microphone so Cousininnie Pearl can plant a wet smack on him; b) Moe Bandy and Joe Stampley dress up for their video like a matched pair of Boy Georges; c) George Jones sings a line in "The Poor Chinese" that goes something like, "Me likee how-wow/Very good chow-chow"; and d) I.A., punk diehards swing into a tune about chicken-stomping?

Those questions can be set aside as far as long as it takes to listen to John Doe's "Crying But My Tears Are Far Away" on the Knitters' first album. A true and resolute honky-tonk weeper, the tune arrives at a time when honky-tonk is as good as gone, and the tears in its beer have all the salt that seasons the greatest country music.

The dictums of punk notwithstanding, singing like a heartbroken but manly man is a tougher proposition any day than merely howling like an Edvard Munch banshee. Big-time solo careers are made of songs like this.

The cut that follows features a bereaved Exene up front, toasting the sound of her man's success as he sings hits at her from some dive's jukebox. But the biggest flubs to be found on the album are also her solo vocal turns. Blessed with the same bony-fingered grasp on pitch as the late Ernest Tubb, Exene shines modestly when twining in tandem with John Doe—is this a bid to become the Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper of Hollywood?—and fails fairly miserably when left on her own. It's rough stretching a wail all the way from palm-tree angst to plain-ass heartsick, and hearing her fail more often than she makes it, you know she knows she's missing but has come up with a way to fake it. That's kitsch.

Except on "Baby Out of Jail," a moldering chestnut with all the mordant glee a gal singer of the ghoulies

sort could ask for. Led on by the grave-digging guitar of Dave Alvin of the Blasters (and Alvin, rattling loose every Sister Rosetta Tharpe lick known to man, woman, or God, is this record's secret hero), she chants it straight and flat and comes out alive, if dead.

Exene and Doe mostly succeed, and Doe mostly triumphs. He's listened long and hard to the masters—you know which Merle Haggard record he first learned "Silver Wings" from—and has ended up with the best they have to offer. He's had a lot of Haggard's dolorous authority—and a voice of his own as well. He's watched George Jones's meandering marches around the hundred novelty tunes, and he's not afraid to take several fresh shoo of his own, telling us on "The Call of the Wrecking Ball" that "The life I lead is mighty slim pickins/There ain't much call for stompin' on chickens." This is hokum, hokum as handed down from singers who made a living wearing shoe polish on their faces. Inside hokum there's room for a man to tell a forthright truth—or at least give off with a yoke-curdling yodel.

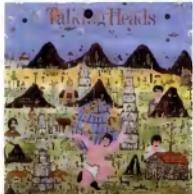
The Knitters' other secret weapon is they've learned the hard way that a satisfied mind and a worried mind are two sides of the same plugged nickel. They've got the guts to drag X's "The New World" right into the middle of "Silver Wings" and "Rock Island Line," just as they've got the nerve to believe that country music's gone and sold the last of its punk.

The Knitters act as if they believe they're the folks to put the punk back into country, and when they click, that looks to be about right. Hokum kicks ass on it.

—Bart Bull

*The Knitters lead singer, Exene, (above) can toast the sound of her man's success in a bereaved voice or send up a mordantly gleeful ghoulish song.*

Edited by Rudy Langlais



## Talking Heads

*Little Creatures*  
Sire

**Little Creatures** sounds like folk music, which is okay by me. Folk music is simple songs sung and played by just plain folks—like the Talking Heads. Traditionally, folk music is politically left-wing, except when it's right-wing; then it's called country music. *Little Creatures* is new-wave folk music.

You can tell this album's got folk music because of the Howard Finster cover. Howard Finster is a great American folk artist. His art is primitive, naive, and "outsider," just like the Talking Heads. Howard Finster is an ex-preacher visionary from the backwoods of Georgia. David Byrne and Jerry Harrison bought some of Finster's paintings while they were on tour, and they became covers for the new Talking Heads singles.

Byrne commissioned Finster to do a new painting for the album cover. Finster may also have had an influence on the Talking Heads' lyrics, because when he was on the *Tonight Show* about a year ago, he sang a couple of songs that were remarkably like Talking Heads songs.

"And She Was" is just like a Finster painting. The woman next door is lying in the grass in her yard. She hears the highway breathing. She sees the earmfuff factory nearby. She is not dreaming. She's floating, drifting above the backyard, taking off her dress. The weather is perfect, and she's part of the weather. Where it's gloomy, she floats above it. The visibility is real clear, and most likely she can see Howard Finster's house in Georgia. This is really a great song. She's not sure what she did to feel this way, but she feels pretty good. She's not touching the ground at all, and neither am I.

—Scott Cohen

I'm feeling pretty great listening to "Creatures of Love," a country song with pedal steel guitar and Tina Weymouth singing harmonies. Tina and Jerry Harrison should sing more often, which they do on this album. The tune is very traditional, but the lyrics sure aren't. A woman made a man and a man made a house and they laid together and later some creatures came out. These creatures are about six inches long, but don't be scared. They're creatures of love and have been here forever. Are you a creature of love? I am.

The girl in "The Lady Don't Mind" is a new-wave folk heroine. She jumps out of a window, then smiles. You think she's going to say something, but you might have to wait awhile. She floats your way when she wants to. She might be make-believe, but she's no trouble. She's not in love; love is not what she's after. She says what she's feeling, but who knows what she's thinking. She's full of surprises. She turns her head and disappears. I don't mind that kind of lady. I've been looking for someone like that for a long time.

"Television Man" is about a contemporary folk hero. TV is my life, I watch it every night, yet I am not attached to my TV, not like the man in the song. The TV is his best friend. TV made him what he is. People like to put TV down, but not him. He watches everything; the world pours into his living room. He's a television man, and proud of it.

If early one morning you climb into the car, put the top down, turn up the volume on the stereo, and take that ride to nowhere, play "Road to Nowhere." It leads to paradise. There's no traffic along the way. No accidents, no speed limit, no blow-outs. On the "Road to Nowhere," there are no traffic lights, stop signs, or radar traps. You don't need seat belts. U-turns are alright. You don't have to watch for falling rocks. On the "Road to Nowhere," there are no deer crossings but lots of scenic overlooks. On the "Road to Nowhere," there's plenty of hot coffee. On the "Road to Nowhere," there are lots of people who know where they're going but not where they've been. There are lots of people with upbeat futures, with maps of cities in their minds and accordinions in their hearts. On the "Road to Nowhere," a lot of happy people are riding off into oblivion, humming all the way.

—Scott Cohen



## Midnight Oil

*Red Sails In The Sunset*  
Columbia

This is real Australian rock. The Sydney quintet deals with the Australia that Qantas and Paul (I'll-throw-another-shrimp-on-the-barbie) Hogan won't tell you about: the outback, with its indigent aborigines and vast plains of red dust, and the desperation of inner-city Sydney.

Midnight Oil refuses to write for an international market blissfully ignorant of Australia, and that stubbornness makes them valuable. *Red Sails In The Sunset* (the follow-up to their critically acclaimed and criminally underplayed 1983 U.S. release, *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1*) is challenging, invigorating, and ultimately enervating. Much of it is difficult to grasp the first time. But after a few spins, the internal logic of the music, lyrics, and arrangements begins to reveal itself. Headphones are recommended.

Jim Moginey's edgy guitar and atmospheric keyboards, Martin Rotsey's surf-cum-metal Stratocaster stylings, and the atomic bass playing of Peter Gifford create a singular instrumental tapestry. Rob Hirsh's athletic drumming relentlessly pushes everything along on the rockabilly-digderidoo workout "Helps Me Help You" and "Jimmy Sharmann's Boxes," the gut-wrenching tale of aboriginal exploitation, but slows the pace on the richly melodic "Sleep" and the eerie synth molasses of "Harrisburg." Above it all is Peter Garrett's voice, barking, sneering, haranguing, and, particularly on the hypnotically grooving "Who Can Stand In The Way," actually singing.

The opening, "When the Generals Walk" (Hirst's vocal debut), is something you wouldn't expect from *Midnight Oil*: a veritable dance track that features quick-cutting edits and rapping associated more with the streets of New York than Sydney.

But the sarcastic attack on the international military-industrial complex is pure, polyunsaturated Oil. "Best of Both Worlds" is an intoxicating metallic blast offering some cautionary words for Oil's fellow Australians. But this isn't all punk-descended thrash. Acoustic guitars turn the snarled "Midnight Oil" into a propulsive, and the stringed "Kosciusko" is layered with call-and-response vocals and an electric-acoustic arrangement that lead to a melancholy coda. Combine the inspired artiness and devilish adventurousness of XTC with the funky anger and forcefulness of the Replacements and you'll get *Midnight Oil's* high-tech primitivism on *Red Sails*. They're everything you could ask for in

a rock and roll band. They've got brains, heart, soul, humor, a conscience, and a unique perspective—and they're incendiary live. *Red Sails* confirms what 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 promised: *Midnight Oil* is not only the Australian band of the '80s, it may very well be the band of the '80s. Period.

—Bill Wolfe



**Cameo**  
*Single Life*  
Polygram

The first time I heard Cameo's song "Rigor Mortis," I knew there was something different about the guys that sang it. They didn't have that West Coast studio glitz nor a midwestern twang in their vocals. They were gritty, raw, alley-honed, and street sharp.

The month was May, and the year was 1977. I was living in Harlem. This was during the time of the "Dodge City" dope wars along 8th Avenue and 147th Street. Heroin kingpin Leroy "Nicky" Barnes was profiled on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* as "Mr. Untouchable," and Julius "Dr. J" Erving was mesmerizing crowds of 3000 to 4000 spectators on a small basketball court on 155th Street.

It was the zenith of the angel-dust rampage, when adolescents and post-teens such as myself stormed 123rd Street to buy peppermint-scented coffins for our brains in the form of miniature \$5 manila envelopes. The Hondurans and the Jamaicans stood at the entrances of the nondescript brownstones, hawking their wares with Coney Island-barber polish: "Reverend Ike, Beezy, Red Devil, Improve, y'all. Come get this dust—dust make ya' head bust!"

Students of Vance Packard they weren't, but these dope boys knew how to use the hidden persuaders. They also had boom boxes to heighten their sales pitch, because dance music salivated the savage beast.

The music was sinistrous, alluring, visceral, cutting, slashing. The merchants near 7th Avenue preferred the pneumatic Ohio back of Shanty and the crack of "Slide." The businessmen near Lenox Avenue favored Cameo's "Rigor Mortis" on an almost 24-hour loop.

I remember a fellow dust "patient" telling me during that long hot summer that the reason "Rigor Mortis" and Cameo were the song and band of choice was that leader Larry Blackman was from 141st Street. And they were the first group to



George D'Boe

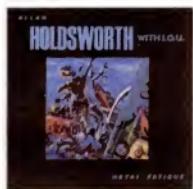
use the expression "That's the joint."

It's been eight years and several platinum albums since Blackman and Cameo left "the joint"—Harlem—behind, to relocate in Atlanta, Georgia. But their latest and possibly last album, *fibers*, has been something special that Blackman wants to pursue a solo career, *Single Life*, shows no signs of creative fatigue.

The title track is an interesting collage of African percussion and digital arrangements. Don't look for a funk powerhouse like "She's Strange"—although "Attack Me With Your Love" and "Atlanta Warrior" take a stab at it, they fall short. Do look for the chorales of Blackman, Tomi Jenkins, Nathan Leffernan, and multi-instrumentalist Charlie Singleton to tear-drop explode on some of their best ballads/soft-focus pop to date. "I'll Never Look for Love" is a knockdown torch song featuring a powerful female vocal in the tradition of Stephanie Mills. That song really illustrates the growth of Cameo's unmatched slow-dance side since its first single in 1976, the poignant "Find My Way."

The ethereal Philly soul psychadelia of "A Goodbye" is Cameo's strongest pop ever. Its solid structure reminds me in a peculiar way of "Any Day Now"—not to say Blackman or Singleton sound like Chuck Jackson or write like Bacharach, but maybe they know a classic when they write one.

—Barry Michael Cooper



### Allan Holdsworth

Metal Fatigue  
Enigma

Back in high school, there were really only three ways to cruise. Each hinged on the music. Or, to be more specific, on the macho guitar in the music.

There were the teenagers-for-life, listening to the sappy Top 40 solos bouncing from mom and dad's car radio. Then there were latter-day James Deans, with the crunching metal chords pounding out of their GTOs. And finally, there was my group, the guys looking oh, so cool with the Jeff Beck and Pat Metheny solos streaming through a pair of tinny Dodge Dart speakers.

Cruising's essence is embodied in the guitar, and we were sure the only good top-down tunes were those with the twisting, soaring riffs of masters like Beck. It's the kind of music air guitars were invented to play on hot summer nights.

Allan Holdsworth must have cruised with us, at least in spirit. His new album, *Metal Fatigue*, picks up right where Beck

left off with *Blow By Blow* and *Hired*. The record features more energetic progressive guitar solos than there are cover versions of "Yesterday."

Don't be fooled by the title or the testimonials on the cover from guys like Eddie Van Halen and Neil Schon, who spare no praise for Holdsworth. This is no chord-crunching record for the GTO cruiser. It sets your mind cruising with notes zipping around like a drug-crazed hummingbird.

Holdsworth has played with the likes of UK and Soft Machine over the years and shows no signs of the excesses that make progressive guitar as appealing to rockers as a Lawrence Welk accordion solo. Each extended jam on *Metal Fatigue* has a purpose, and it's not music only those with a lifetime subscription to *Guitar Player* can appreciate.

Particularly in tunes like "Home" and "Devil Take the Hindmost," Holdsworth's style is like expressionist painting. Whether he's blazing off on a tour of the frets or floating a dreamy solo into the air, Holdsworth uses his guitar to sketch images.

There are a few weak spots on the record—like every time a violinist pipes in. (The title track and "Panic Station" feature Paul Williams, and Paul Korda sings on "In the Mystery.") Vocals are to progressive guitar what K Mart is to Saks Fifth Avenue. The lyrics are silly and the singers sound like Journey rejects.

All you want with this kind of music is plenty of free-form guitar spilling out of the grooves. Holdsworth, like Beck and the others before him, shows on *Metal Fatigue* that when done right, progressive, jazzy guitar creates the best top-down sound around. It requires skill and intelligence, two things the hippest cruisers know about.

—Craig Tomashoff



### Dire Straits

Brothers in Arms  
Warner Brothers

Mark Knopfler may be the most lyrical of all rock guitarists, and when the intensity of his words approaches that of his ravishing stratocaster licks, the song soars.

That doesn't happen as often as I'd like on this new album by a band I've cared about for a long time, but I find myself returning to certain cuts the way one might come back to a favorite chair. The grooves are so comfortable you can fall right in and the playing's so pretty you stay put.

On the haunting ballad "Your Latest Trick," a sinewy sax intro from one of the Brecker brothers (those welcome guests on countless albums) sets up perfectly the string of surreal city images Knopfler intones in his husky, Dylanesque drawl: "All the late-night bargains have been struck/Between the satin beaus and their belles/And prehistoric garbage trucks/Have the city to themselves . . ."

Most likely, Knopfler's recent work with Dylan on *Infidels* was inspirational, and I don't think living in the Big Apple has hurt his consciousness either.

While "Your Latest Trick," the radio-play favorite "So Far Away," and the melodic "Why Worry" are all songs that deal with emotional ups and downs, several tunes directly address social and political concerns. With guest star Sting repeating "Money for Nothing" in his earliest falsetto, "Money for Nothing" launches into an acerbic satire of vid-rock culture from the point of view of a working stiff installing televisions, among other appliances, for a living: "Now look at them yo-yos/That's the way you do it/You play the guitar on the MTV/That ain't workin'/That's the way you do it/Money for nothin' and chicks for free . . ." Not exactly subtle stuff, but it's a breath of fresh air for anyone who's a little tired of the guitar-and-garter mix that most bands serve up for visuals. The song rocks as powerfully as anything Dire Straits has done, fueled by Knopfler's chunky power chords. He plays as immaculately as he always does, but with distortion laid on so thick it becomes part of the song's critique of mindless music.

In "Ride Across the River," a sparse, tropical, reggae-tinged groove, we get something like an '80s version of Donovan's "Universal Soldier," a protagonist who is part true believer and part mercenary, half victim and half victimizer: "I'm a soldier of freedom in the army of man/We are the chosen, we're the bastards . . . /I'm a soldier of fortune, I'm a dog of war/And we don't give a damn who the killing is for . . ." It's a moving tribute to the verity that in war it's the paper that counts.

The central figure of "The Man's Too Strong"—simple folk picking à la early Dylan or late Springsteen that explodes with great swatches of guitar sounds—is a repentant police-state strongman who finds that the tables have turned: ". . . I've called the tune/To many a torture session/Now they say I'm a war criminal, and I'm fading away/Father, please hear my confession . . ."

The last song on the record continues the political theme with outstanding craftsmanship in the words and music. The singing is quiet but authoritative, and Knopfler's Strat cuts a dark swath across the battle-scarred landscape conjured up by the lyrics. Once again we have a soldier, probably a revolutionary, displaced from his home and facing death with the realization, "We're fools to make war/On our brothers in arms . . ." It's not a new message, but at least something other than sex, cars, or drugs is being talked about here. Take that and the quality of the musicianship, and you've got a lot.

—E. Brooks



### Album Artwork Not Designed at Press Time

#### Burning Spear

Resistance  
Heartbeat

#### Justin Hinds and the Dominos

Travel With Love  
Nighthawk

Certain church singers caught up in the spirit pushed their voices past all known limits with such spine-tingling fervor it's downright frightening. Rock and roll and rhythm and blues get their megawatt kick from gospel. Reggae's finest singers also cut their teeth on church hymns or Rastafari. And in JA these religious traditions just happen to be major repositories of African drumming tradition. So, yes, African roots rock reggae has roots with African roots. While the heartbeat has singing derived from robust praise-singing and street-corner rukodays. That roots tradition is out of fashion in Jamaica a move so followers of The Spirit get only occasional housed roots of inspiration, such as these two classical reggae albums.

For 15 years Burning Spear, a.k.a. Winston Rodney, has ignored musical fashion while a sea of musical trends washes about him. He doesn't perform, he testifies . . . about his vision of Marcus Garvey, about the evils of the system, about Africa—the Promised Land. He sings sparse chantlike melodies in his smoky, mournful voice—a relentless, impassioned wailing. And, as Spear once said, the music is "dry and heavy" with drum and bass kicking hard, hand drums punctuating in machine-gun bursts of rhythmic invention, horns droning hypnotic choruses.

There's no such thing as a bad Spear record or performance, but some are more accessible than others. On *Resistance* he's added some superficial colorations in an effort to make the music less forbidding—mewling synthesizers and hyperkinetic rock-guitar solos—but unlike similar contemporizing efforts, these

overdubs are in the rhythmic pocket. Spear even sings a rocking chant on the title cut. Overall, maybe not a heavyweight classic on the order of Marcus Garvey or *Hail H.I.M.*, but Resistance does deliver heavyweight goods.

... how come you don't know him? Because for years at a time he turned his back on the fussing and fighting and money games of the city and lived in rural obscurity.

But lovers of classical reggae can rejoice because *Travel With Love*, Justin Hinds and the Dominos' first LP in eight years, delivers the endlessly inventive rhythms and inspirational rustic vocals so rarely found on reggae LPs these days. The Wallers' rhythm section works the beat of 15 years past with the guile of jazz drummer to even attempt the brilliant off-center syncopated rolls on "Love You." Hinds sings his simple tunes in a grainy, undulating tenor—a more nakedly honest singing voice was never heard—while the Dominos float gentle street-corner harmonies behind him. Yes, the LP is a bit too samey, and I wish the harmonies were further up in the mix, but *Travel With Love* is substantial music.

—Randall F. Grass



**Various Artists**  
*The Enigma Variations*  
Enigma

Enigma Records, of Torrance, California, is one of the most prolific indies of the post-punk era. Its roster now includes "psychedelia, hardcore trash, copunk, art damage, mutant metal or anything else." The 26 songs by 26 acts on this sampler attest to the label's eclecticism. The cuts range from Kraut's metal-edged New York hardcore to ska from The Untouchables, Rain Parade's lysergic journeys to Game Theory's bright pop, Screamin' Sirens courted rock to electro-happy SSG and Cathedral of Tone.

The best tracks are those that tempt you to seek out more by the same artist. The worst tracks force you to lower the volume to lessen the pain. Most of Enigma's players are stuck in music's minor leagues for good reason, although the top talent could conceivably enter the majors.

In general, I prefer those Enigma artists who inject a bit of irony into their tunes. John Trubee's "Blind Man's Penis," for example, is amusing, although less so than the story behind it. (The wacked-out Trubee sent a poem, "Stevie Wonder's Penis," to one of those companies that puts writing to music, and what came back was the Variations cut.) Scott Goddard's "Cowpunk" is outrageous synthesizer noises, laughter and carousel piano interrupting the hokey, drawled vocals.

More impressive, though, are the songs in which the humor is supported by compelling music. The "Screamin' Sirens" XTC-like vocal harmonies and B-52-ish camp on "Maniac" explain why this all-female quintet has developed a large cult following in their native L.A. (Their debut LP, *Fiesta*, was released this spring.) And The Pandoras, another all-woman L.A. group, are downright hilarious. On "Worm Boy" the singer atop '70s glamrock guitar, bitches about her wimpy boyfriend, snarling, "Worm boy, Worm boy, immature boy/Acting six years old/Why can't you think for yourself instead of doing what you're told."

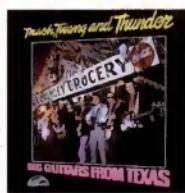
The ironic songs aren't the only appealing tunes, however. Tex and the Horseheads' "Oh Mother" is a haunting plea for help and the group's most tuneful song. In her deep, raspy voice, Texacala Jones moans, "Oh mother, why do I feel like dying? Say something to take away the pain."

These cuts are even more heroic for their avoidance of the overbearing self-importance that plagues Greg Sage—his "Straight Ahead" features some of the godawfulst lyrics ever stamped on vinyl—and dead-in-the-grooves '60s retracks like The Jet Black Berries' plodding "Shadowdrive." In pleasant contrast, Channel 3 balances their urgent vocals on "True West" with driving acoustic guitars and energetic fervor recalling The Clash's "Groovy Times."

A few Enigma bands may find enormous success, like Motley Crue. Some—like Green on Red, .45 Grave, and Kraut—already have loyal audiences, however small they may be. And even if they wallow in obscurity, the other groups have at least been given a chance. For this they—and in some cases, we—should thank Enigma.

—Robert Seidenberg

## Tales from the Bogusphere



## LeRoi Brothers

## Lucky Lucky Me Profile

**Various Artists**

## Trash, Twang and Thunder—Big Guitars from Texas Jungle

The LeRoi Brothers are old, they're ugly, and they're stupid. They treat their women rough and their liquor even rougher. They play guitars that explode with distortion and treble. They still write songs about Elvis being abducted into the Army. They wouldn't know an original idea if it spit tobacco on their boots, but they'll take a good old idea and rock it loud and tough.

The LeRoi Brothers are great. And they have a jumping new album to prove it. *Lucky Lucky Me*, their second LP, is guitar-bass kick rock and roll at its most brilliantly myopic. The LeRoi Brothers make no apologies for being reactionary; they just kick over everything in sight. Although they marinade their rock in blues, 'billy', and country, this is more a case of bad seeds than good roots.

Five, the band is helly fun. Singer Joe

"J.D." Doerr shakes and bakes like a hoodlum in heat, while guitarists Steve Doerr and newcomer Evan Johns squeeze off piercing, twangy licks. However, their two previous EPs and one LP didn't capture their heat on vinyl. They sounded exactly like what they aren't: relics, or worse, revivalists. **Lucky** **Lucky** **Me** still doesn't pack the LeRois live punch—you probably wouldn't want that much sweat and flat beer and cigarette butts in your living room anyway—but it is wildly reckless and loose enough to get the point across.

The Doern brothers share most of the singing and songwriting. Joe's stuff is tougher, Steve's more aberrantly romantic. The duelling guitars bend and twist the songs into hideous blues mutations. Joe's frenetic harp slices through the fighting, and the rhythm section crashes and burns. Nothing fancy. Just smoke.

A word of warning: the LeRoi Brothers don't always kick ass. Myopia has its drawbacks as well as its advantages, and Steve occasionally drags the band into unctuously corny lovebird ballads. It's not a pretty sight.

Lucky Lucky Me is the first non-street-side produced by Profile, the home of Run-D.M.C. The label's made its first step into straight rock with the right foot—and with style. Watch out for these guys.

**Trash, Twang and Thunder—Big Guitars from Texas** is a collection of instrumental by an all-star pickup band that includes a couple of LeRois, Don Lead's Tailgators, and assorted other swatohgs. Through two covers and a dozen dramatically unoriginal originals, the album shows off that monstrous Texas guitar sound, a justification for human existence that's pitifully short supply. Unfortunately, that's about all it does. Everything is in basically the same dynamic range, and nothing captures the full-bodied power of the LeRois' album. Still, if you need a fix, there aren't too many places you can go to hear classics like "Bulldozer Boogie," "Do the Doozit," and "Chainsaw," not to mention a rip-roaring version of the theme from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. Score, if you must, from Jungle Records, Box 3034, Austin, TX 78764.

—John Island

### The Mad Peck and Big Al Pavlow



## Various Artists

Woodstock

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab

**FIRST VOICE:** Look behind you! Look behind you! The weather! The wea-thuh! **SECOND VOICE:** While we switch over . . . it looks like we're gonna get a little bit of rain, so you better cover up. If it does, if we should have a slight power problem, just cool it out. We'll sit here with you, it'll be okay.

**THIRD VOICE:** (to people climbing on towers) Everybody get down!

**THUNDER:** ((0))

**SECOND VOICE:** And let's keep it nice and cool. Alright, everybody just sit down, wrap yourself up, lighten up. Hold onto your neighbor, man.

**FOURTH VOICE:** Hey, if you think really hard, MAYBE WE CAN STOP THIS RAIN! **CROWD:** ((0)))

**THUNDER:** (((((0)))))) **SECOND VOICE:** Everybody just sit down, we'll have to ride it out. Please get off those towers, we don't need any extra weight on them . . .

**FOURTH VOICE:** NO RAIN NO RAIN

**FOURTH VOICE AND CROWD:** NO RAIN NO RAIN NO RAIN NO RAIN NO RAIN

The Woodstock Nation, just two generations and a supermarket produce department removed from its all-natural agrarian roots, looks skyward. It gets wet. Maybe the whole thing's not a group hallucination after all. The Nation commences quasi-tribal chanting. Noble savages on a picnic, backpacking back to—back at—Nature, beer-hall fascists to the mass rally born, they shout at the fucking rain. They yell at it to make it go away.

It's so embarrassing, man.  
—Jimi Hendrix, onstage at Woodstock

Nothing, not the lid of grass or even the tab of acid, was more of a sacrament to the Woodstock Nation than the recorded album. The *In-Na-Gadda-Da-Vida*-sized freak-out that took one whole side of an album was the exact length of the Nation's average indoor trip; the album (the concept-album, the rock-opera album, the solo album, the superstar-jam album) was the exact shape of the Nation's grandest artistic conceits.

It's only fitting, then—that the three-record soundtrack to the film *Woodstock* and the two-record *Woodstock II*, a Nation's aural birth certificate, should be reissued in a limited-edition, half-speed-mastered, Japanese-pressed, high-definition-vinyl, five-record, silver-foil-covered boxed set, an object of antiquity in an age of Walkman and VCR. It's certainly not the fault of the edition limiters, the half-speed masterers, the vinyl appraisers, or even the Japanese record pressers that it all sounds like shit.

We do go to hear Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young & Townsend & Moon & Dalrey segue from "Wooden Ships" into "We're Not Gonna Take It," with one sounding as pretentious and petulant as the other, and no line between. We hear John Sebastian sing "I Had a Dream" like the



Nation's own hormone-deficiency poster boy. We hear Richie Havens practicing for his airline commercials with "Freedom." We even get to hear Melanie's "My Beautiful People" and "Birthday of the Sun," wherein she demonstrates that she knows 300,000 suckers when she sees them.

Even so, it's not without appeal to the historically inclined, or entirely devoid of docudramatic possibilities. We'll never know what the blackface minstrels of the 19th century really sounded like, but thanks to Country Joe & The Fish's remarkable "Rock & Soul Music," we do have a timeless and diamond-perfect example of traditional American whiteface minstrelsy as practiced by a troupe of Berkeley boys during the late psychedelic era of the '60s.

Woodstock: *The Big Fat Box* is nothing if not instructive. Through attentive listening we learn, for example, that the real title to Alvin Lee's lightning-fingered, infinitely awful 9-minute yank-off is actually, as he announced it, "I'm Going Home by Helicopter." Joan Baez, the Yoko of her time and place, flaunts her as yet undivorce draft-resisting husband in front of the crowd like a spanking new addition to her politically correct charm bracelet. And in a particularly hilarious bit of hippie kitsch, thanks to the half-speed mastering or maybe the Japanese pressers, you can actually hear David Crosby tell the other guys that he's got the joint for when the electric part of the set starts. Hi-fidelity is a wonderful thing.

Meanwhile, the brown acid's bad. Or not bad, but a bummer. Or not a bummer, but as the ultra-diplomatic, hipster SECOND VOICE puts it, "The brown acid is not specifically too good." Which is not to admit that the sacred synergies might possibly not be exactly perfectly O.K.,

which is to avoid admitting that some of the things we do may be, specifically, not too good.

Who would shell out \$75 to buy such a thing? Somebody will. But what happens when they get home and actually try to listen to it? Just hearing the onstage I as it keeps turning into we and then you and then back to I again is a complete course in noblesse oblige, crowd manipulation, and the divine right of rock stars, especially since most of the musical activity that follows is almost uniformly godawful. You can own it, but you're flat-out never going to be able to explain to anybody who wasn't there why the guy in *Canned Heat* sings "Going Up the Country" like that.

Hey, man, I just gotta say . . . that you people [laughs] I have got to be the strongest bunch of people I ever saw [laughs].—Stephen Stills, onstage at Woodstock, just prior to hearing that Crosby's got the joint ready for the electric set

Not long afterward, Stills takes up what must be a good minute of our ultra-hi-fi, Japanese-pressed time just trying to intro "Wooden Ships," a tune where the hippies split town for outer space in—you guessed it: like Alvin Lee and all the rest of the rock stars, Stills will depart via helicopter.

I'm going to fly a-way. . . .  
—from "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" by Stephen Stills

We'll never know what the music the blackface minstrels of the 19th century were trying to ape really sounded like, but thanks to Jimi Hendrix ("The Star-Spangled Banner") and Sly and the Family Stone ("Higher"), we do have an ex-

ample of post-blackface psychedelic pimpery as practiced in the late '60s by wickedly talented black Americans with the will to get over. It sounds a lot better than songs about famous rock-star girlfriends or trains to Marrakesh.

Arlo Guthrie has just sung a song congratulating himself for smuggling some pot into Los Angeles. He's begun rambling. Yeah, it's far out, I was just rappin' to the fuzz, can you dig it . . . There's every indication he intends to go on for *In-Na-Gadda-Da-Vida*-length when suddenly Sha Na Na appears (and who thought you'd ever be glad to see them!), sounding like Danny & the Juniors taking speed in the dorm at Columbia, and they bowl his frizzy-haired ass right off his stool.

It is good that these records exist. They document a curious, sickening phenomenon. They force open a memory of a time when millions—millions!—of middle-class white children of American privilege were perfectly capable of deluding themselves that they were entirely different than the rest of humanity because they swallowed pills and smoked pot, because of something they consumed.

The brown acid stank.

Whheewww—that kid's gonna be far out!  
—John Sebastian, onstage at Woodstock, on hearing that someone in the crowd has had a baby

Recently, John Sebastian has been receiving death-threat letters from someone who claims to be a teenager born at the Woodstock Festival.

—Bart Bull

• B O B



# D Y L A N ♠

## Now Playing

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# UNDERGROUND

A little Agitpop with Frightwig; Pushead and his wild, wonderful Bacteria—Poison Ideo, Genocide Express, Septic Death, Enola Gay, and Holy Dolls; the Bobs; Les Zarjaz; and Deja Voodoo, two cool cats, in this month's installment of the continuing vinyl ventures underground.

Column by Andrea 'Enthol'

"There are really not that many problems in the world, because most people have the same problems," declares **Agitpop** on the back cover of its debut LP, *Feast of the Sunfish*. An album of avantpop with sparse, lean production, flat, toneless vocals, and minimalist harmonies, *Feast* couples hollow, echo-laden Public Image crashing with teetering horn and scratchy bass in abruptly punctuated compositions reminiscent of early Gang of Four. There's nothing theatrical or complicated about Agitpop's simple charms. A child's toy xylophone forms the basis for "Reasons of State," where "large-scale tactics hit small-scale homes." A hidden samba keeps resurfacing from some forsaken party, and dead fish float on New York's Hudson River while the president, the sun, and a pony sleep. Agitpop whispers an understated message of distant brotherhood for all. Community 3 Recordings, 11-09 30th Drive, Astoria, NY 11102, offers this record.

If Lydia Lunch had formed the Shaggs instead of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, the result might have sounded like **Frightwig**, whose guitars swim through a morass of swirling dirge and sludge as four mondo women scream, rant, and tackle the memory of Phil Spector's girl groups and the macho, sleazy sex that has been tied to rock and roll. They're bad—not as in naughty teases, but rough and unschooled; not professional with instruments, and unconcerned about those fine points. They're real bad—deliberately. Tough, brash, and brassy, full of sassy retorts to rute boy-toy rock and roll, Frightwig spews an anti-sexist message in terms aimed to send the gentlewomen of traditional feminist music scurrying for earplugs. No protests couched in traditional pop. Frightwig never protests: it celebrates macho's impending downfall in tunes that include "Hot Papa," "Vagabondage," and "My Crotch Does Not Say Go."

"I'll Talk to You and Smile" is a ripply raw and tear-encrusted screaming session with side vocals inspired by a melody line from the Beatles' "A Day in the Life" and a story line only hinted at in the lyric. "I know who you are, I know what you did." "I don't know what he or she did, but I do know there's something beneath the caterwauling surface and loose garageland bashing that makes Frightwig's *Ca! Farm Faboo* an album of grating drones with guts and a soul. You can glimpse that wild and raunchy soul by connecting with Subterranean Records, 577 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94110.

The hard corps' answer to Aubrey Beardley is **Pushead**, a 26-year-old record producer, band member, and graphic artist now living in San Francisco by way of Boise, Idaho. Friendly, mild-mannered Brian Schroeder in real life, Pushead draws art nouveau gross-outs laced with visual jokes. For the cover of *Cleanse the Bacteria*, his 18-group compilation of world hardcore, Pus has drawn a blear-eyed, not-quite-human being in tattered punk and military regalia with toothbrush heads on his leather armband instead of spikes. Lest this toothless creature find these 16 bristled appliances insufficient for his oral hygiene, two spares are tied to his thigh. There's no toothpaste in sight.

"Sometimes society doesn't want things that are good for it," just like kids don't always want to brush, explains Pushead in response to questioning about his pseudonym. "Pimples, for instance, are the result of the body winning over bad germs. Most people see them as blemishes to be eliminated, but really, they're good for you."

"I'm good, but some people see me and my artwork as a blemish on society," says Pushead, explaining that *Cleanse the Bacteria* is a metaphor, particularly for the attitude the mainstream music world reserves for punk.

*Cleanse the Bacteria* is about punk's many splen-





dored variations, starting with *Part One*, a secretive British ensemble that contributes powerfully flanged guitar streaks that shimmer and scratch in "Black Mass." Portland's *Poison Idea* thrashes hoarse and gravel-throated rants over deep metallic bass chords on "Typical," and the fluid metal guitars of Amsterdam's *Genocide Express* helps the band stick to hardcore's first rule: loud and fast is good, but faster is better. Whether in English, Dutch, Austrian, Japanese, or German, every shouted, ranting, and chanted vocal is recorded and mastered to keep the lyrics clear. You don't have to understand "Wir Sind Schon Tot II" ("We Are Already Dead II") to feel the power, and you're not forced to try in lame frustration to decipher words you don't know. The song's obviousness in German, so you can sing along, will not be an easy test.

Pushhead's own *Septic Death* presents a wall of metal-fused speedcore with sparse, lightly echo-laden drumming to break the pace of "Terrorain." Its sheer, heavy guitar density threatens—but is not allowed—to melt Death's music into thrasher din. Little shards of feedback punctuate "Enda Gay," by a Danish band of the same name, which ends its cut with a truncated atomic explosion, giving way to Finland's *Holy Dolls*, whose "Beast of the Apocalypse" totally changes the record's texture and pace with its swimming electric organ swirls and Finnish lyrics.

Where most hardcore albums fail by blitzing hard, fast, intense, and more intense until one can absorb no more, Pushhead understands the need for contrast within angst and energy and provides a bristling dose of mayhem to blast cobwebs from any speaker, butt, or brain. For \$7, Pus himself sells this album through P.O. Box 701, San Francisco, CA 94101, with a bonus flier, sticker, or poster.

Now forget electric guitars. Synthesizers, horns, and keyboards are superfluous, too, when the four northern Californian vocal virtuosos known collectively as the *Bobs* unleash wicked humor and instrumental impersonations on unsuspecting vinyl. Excepting a couple of finger snaps, thigh slaps, hand claps, and echoes added to the mix, there's nothing artificial, ever. Ingredients are 100 percent human voice. Richard Greene, the man who launched a thousand hips as the basso profundo of the jeans jingle "Fall into the Gap," has a voice of subterranean bassoony to play off Janie Scott's bold and soulful church-choir tones. Gunnar Madsen cowrites with Greene the band's light and sizzling pokes at human foibles, including their housewife's lament, "Trash," with its gleeful background doo-wop repetitions of "knee deep, knee deep" and "bag it up, bag it up." The Bobs sing "My baby loves trash" as if it was a '50s pop tune, harmonizing in four directions instead of adopting a barbershop-style unity: "I have to dig, and dig, and dig, just to find the bathroom in the morning." They call their music new-wave a cappella, but even if you called them a doo-wop barbershop quartet, Madsen thinks it mainly sounds would really be warm, winning, and uncategorizingly universal. The Bobs' album, simply titled *The Bobs*, is sold through Kaleidoscope Records, P.O. Box 0, El Cerrito, CA 94530.

Proponents of gavotte rock, *Les Zarjaz* bury their genteel vocals in a gauze of echo and pick out clear, simple melodies on (synth-assisted?) harpsichord to make ye olde folksong come to gentle, lilting lyle. Even though the A side is only 1 minute 44 seconds and the B barely more than 2 flat, Les'Z clean, clear, straightforward melodies are so crisp and fresh, even 30 seconds make for an aural shower on a hot, rocking day. Creation Records distributes this 7-inch single through Rough Trade, 61-71 Collier St., London N1, England.

Cat Trance (the C pronounced as a stutter rather than an initial), with sensuous, sinewy jazz horn leading the caravan,

The multitalented Pushhead: as lead singer of his band Septic Death (opposite page); his illustration for Cleanse the Bacteria cover (left); and yet another Pushhead illo (below). Bottom of page: Deja Voodoo's too-cool Gerald Van Herk (left) and Tony Dewald.



goes for an evening of "Rattling Ghosts," a wordless, Arabic snake charm with finger bells and the nasal siren of every car in Amman honking in unison on its way to the mosque. Flip the record, and a bang-bang machine-gun drum stirs visions of Beirut. A hollowly detached female voice from the Batcave/Bauhaus/Belfiore family of trance and dancesters, under a pounding disco beat with whinneys of saxophone bleating and squealing, tells the story of her midnight larceny in "She Steals Cars." Sleekly seductive feline slywank, "Cars" is a senseless atmospheric dance, whooshing, swirling, and slinking into your ear. You may need a little detective to locate this 12-inch, Ink Records, a subsidiary of the Red Flame label, is distributed in its British homeland by the appropriately named Cartel, Rough Trade, 326 Sixth St., San Francisco, CA 94103, should be able to make a connection.

Two of the coolest cats to tackle raw polyvinyl chloride are Tony Dewald and Gerald Van Herk, known collectively as *Deja Voodoo*. Van Herk, with droll, dry wit and deadpan intonation, provides the duo's subtly bongos vocals, while Dewald adds basic primitive funk on skins. Couching their delta rockabilly with a layer of hyperspeed acoustic thrash and sandpapered distortion, Voodoo knows better than you how to decouple cassettes and send rhymes on a mission—a crash-and-burn mission. Cool? A mutantly wicked combination of folk and acoustic guitar blues that's rockabilly-and-roll, too. Deja Voodoo leaves all but the most pretentious, snickering in their sneakers with oddball acoustic stomp and titles that include "Bugs for Christmas," "Take Out the Trash," and "Bo Diddley's Cat." Though they call this, their second album, *Too Cool to Live, Too Smart to Die*, it's really too cool to live without. Connect with Midnight Records at Box 390, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10011, or OG Music, P.O. Box 182, Station E Montreal, Quebec H3J2L1, for Cemetery, their equally cool first.



W. Kellman/Program

# Singles

You want 12 inches, we've got it!  
(Nothing less than seven inches—guaranteed.)

Column by John Leland



A great single is an exquisite thing. It doesn't leave you hungry for more or curious as to the mating habits of the artists. It gets in, absorbs your entire being, and gets out—no guilt, no alibis. For the most part, this column's artists turn out albums that aren't worth crossing the street to hear, but their singles are another matter entirely. Not exactly one-hit wonders, they can sustain their clarity of vision brilliantly for five minutes. Stretch it to 40, however, and you're going toe-to-toe with some heavy dross. So, without further ado, a lot of real single-singles this month: some reggae for Africa, bad politics and good sex, unlikely cover versions, and inspired collaborations.

groove concept to suit his needs. In this case, he packs it in on itself and rocks it for pure unsyncopated power. Wipe the sweat. Or do I mean drop the bomb? Whatever, give Thomas Dolby some credit, and get off your ass, etc., etc.

**L.L. Cool J: "I Want You" b/w "Dangerous" (Def Jam)**

L.L. is cool, and that's fact. His "I Need a Beat" rocked the house like a piece of street dug up and thrown onto the turntable. With "I Want You," the cool one tries to go New Edition/Force M.D. fly-boy, but on his terms: no music, no singing—he's got to make it into the pants of his choice on the strength of his unmettered behind-the-beat rap and a razor beat-box program. Wish him luck; the competition is certainly slicker. "Dangerous" is the tougher cut, thanks to some juicy scratching and a harder rap. (5 University Pl., New York, NY 10003)

**Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam with Full Force: "I Wonder If I Take You Home" (Columbia)**

If she does, will he behave his handsome self? No chance. Lisa, "Cousin, if she didn't already know, she probably wouldn't be considering the proposition in the first place. And that's the tension that makes this lightweight but catchy teenage hip-pop click. The "should-I-or-shouldn't-I" question has rarely been presented with such a keen appreciation of the merits of saying yes. But Lisa, the guys from U.T.F.O., who run with your buddies Full Force and who utter the Word about girls around the block, say you've mastered the affirmative. The start of another name game?

**Vitamin Z: "Burning Flame" (Geffen)**

Vitamin Z may change the way you listen to music: you may give it up entirely. This "specially priced two-cut maxi-single" (actually two mixes of the same cut—aptly preceded, but why lie about it?) tries to stretch its obscenely whiny and lightweight self over a totally unjustified seven-plus minutes. Nothing happens in the song or in the mix. The band hasn't got enough ideas



**George Clinton: "Double Oh-Oh" (Capitol)**

Dr. Funkenstein is looking the black holes of Minneapolis and D.C. in the face. No longer secure in his position as biggest, baddest, blackest motherfucker since Sly, Clinton burns rubber on a wicked heavy-metal/R&B groove. This single is a sense of urgency that Clinton's world hasn't had in a while, and it shows that while Mothership alumni like Bootsy and Junie Morrison can get on the one, Clinton alone can warp the

groove to fill the tune, let alone extend it. Plus the dreary melody and self-pitying lyrics are pathetic. How dare they call this wet rag "Burning Flame"?

**Paul Hardcastle: "19" (Chrysalis)**

This is Hardcastle's sharpest slice of beatbox muzak to date, but it's still a pain in the ass. The power of the track comes from a deadpan voiceover about Vietnam that keys on the average age of the American soldiers who fought there—19. A travesty, yeah. But that isn't the full reason that the war was unconscionable, and Hardcastle ignores the rest of the story. This hits like all political chic: momentarily chilling, but not redemptive. What is Hardcastle's point that we should use older dudes to level Manafort?

**Paul Young: "Everything You Go Away" b/w "This Means Anything" (Columbia)**

What can you say bad about Paul Young, except perhaps that he generally doles out incredibly bland versions of even blander songs? On the other hand, he's got prodigious pipes, and he knows how to wrap them around a ballad. Here, he snatches an ace Daryl Hall tune and, dispensing with his penchant for ersatz British soul, caresses it into warmly flowing fuck music. This bent some ears as an import and should put Young over the top with its domestic release. The flip is more of that ersatz shit.

**Madonna: "Angel" b/w "Into the Groove" (Sire)**

Here's an interesting way to extend a dance mix: add a bunch of tuneless duds chanting the singer's name to the beat. "Angel" is Nile Rodgers doing what he does best: turning crass product into cash product. A rehash of "Lucky Star" with an even lamer melody and punch. But you probably didn't care anyway. "Into the Groove," however, is dandy pop disco, the most, er, real thing she's done to date. It gathers momentum and doesn't insult your intelligence. I hate her, too, but this sucker is as light as heravel. She knows a good deal more about grooves than about virginity.

### B-Side: "She's Hot" (Celloid)

Boy, is she ever. B-Side, who got her tag from the French rap she laid on the back of Fab 5 Freddy's "Change the Beat," combines Sade's sultry elegance with Madonna's brazen sexuality, without the crass upward mobility of either. Stylish and voluptuous, she could do her thing over Marlovian's strings and still make your nature rise. Happens, however, she's got a beast of an abreast, courtesy of Tony Allen, Felix's former drummer and collaborator—some even say he invented the genre. I won't go that far, but I will say that this groove turns you seriously around. Allen's own single is also murder, but B-Side's seduction still puts this one over the top. It cuts anything on her file, if diffuse. *Cairo Nights* LP (155 W. 29th St., New York, NY 10001)

### Fats Comet: "Dee Jay's Dream" b/w "Eat the Beat" (World)

What do you get when you put England's most brilliantly eccentric producer

(Adrian Sherwood) in a fully equipped room with America's baddest rhythm section from the old Sugar Hill house band? A monster groove in a sensually stimulating framework, that's what. Which is not necessarily the same as great music, but this jumbly sound collage comes damned close. A transatlantic, interracial thing that tames the technological beast with some heavy-duty body funk. William S. Burroughs even raps at the end of the flip. *An homage to Sherwood's cut-up mentor?* "I didn't even know who the guy was," says drummer Keith LeBlanc. (70 Greenwich Ave., #562, New York, NY 10011)

### New Order: "The Perfect Kiss" (Qwest/Warner)

Contrary to semiprivate thought, New Order is not an unsubstantiated continuation of Ian Curtis's Joy Division but a wholly different band, with different ideals and different ways of approaching them. Joy Division was oppressively brooding

and obsessive; New Order is bittersweet and more into groove than groan. If New Order is compulsive about anything, it's sound. When the group signed with Quincy Jones's Qwest label, it seemed a match fraught with more promise than Hagger vs. Hearn. Well, Q didn't lift a finger, but it's still a gem with punch. A dreamy, melancholy melody runs over the electronic and unfortunately guitarless hooks. But the best part is the end, when they turn all the machines to max and mash the thing up.

### SIDESWIPES

**Stanley Clarke's** boat-box version of Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." (Epic/CBS) unwittingly exposes both the high-falutin' boast of the Boss's lyrics and the distance between Clarke and relevant contemporary music. Pretty funny nonetheless. . . . Arthur Baker's jumping remix of **General Public's** "Hot You're Cool" (I.R.S.) adds even more force to Dave and



George Clinton

Roger's most driving song. . . . The disappointingly unsubstancial "Sanctified Lady" by **Marvin Gaye** (Columbia) shows why "Sexual Healing" was such a marvelous surprise; it labors along and only occasionally shows Gaye's magical warmth. . . . Original Art Ensemble of Chicago drummer Phillip Wilson leads Bill Laswell, P-Funk head Bernie Worrell, Weather Reporter Jaco Pastorius, Olu Dara, Paul Butterfield (I), and Manu Dibango on **Deadline's** monster afro-jam, "Makossa Rock" (Celloid). . . . Speaking of all-star sessions, **Gregory Isaacs** and **Mutabaruka** join the I-Threes and members of **Steel Pulse** and **Third World** in the utopian "Land of Africa" (RAS, Box 42517, Washington, D.C. 20015), the second-pronged Ethiopian famine relief disc out there. . . . The first is the **British Reggae Artists Famine Appeal Team's** thunderclub, "Let's Make Africa Green Again" (Island), which features more than 200 musicians, including Aswad, Dennis Brown, and **Mikey Dread** in a heavy monster mash. Unlike "We Are the World," these two platters buck the star system and rock like crazy. . . . Brix Smith of the Fall leads **The Adult Net** through a straight reading of the *Strawberry Alarm Clock's* fake psychedelic classic, "Incense and Peppermints," and a straight-ahead wipout of hubby Mark E's "Searching for the Now" (Beggar's Banquet import). . . . "Dig We Must" b/w "Flexzone" is the not entirely happening new tribal art disco thing from **Liquid Liquid**, the white boys whose "The Cavern" supplied the uncredited bottom for the *Furious Five's* "White Lines (Don't Do It)" (99 Records, 99 MacDougal St., New York, NY 10012). . . . **Lovebug Starski's** leaden "Rappin'" (Atlantic) is a powerful letdown after his sharp "Do the Right Thing". . . . **The Deele's** dynamic electroflash funk on "Material Thang" (Solar/Elektra) is as hot as it is stupid—which is a lot. . . . **Go West** can go the hell off into the sunset for all I care; "Call Me" (Chrysalis) is even more insipid than "We Close Our Eyes". . . . **The Bomb Party's** "Raygun" EP (Abstract import) is gloom rock with a rare sense of humor. . . . "Knowledge Me," by **The Concept** (Def Jam), is rap five taken humorously to its ultimate degradation. . . . Lost and definitely weird, **Tiny Tim** returns rather weakly with "Mr. Ed" b/w "Memory" (Broken, Box 1009, Cedar Hill, TX 75104).

Courtesy/Qwest Records

No guilt, no alibis from: (L-R) George Clinton, Anne B-Side, New Order (top, Stephen Morris, Gillian Gilbert; bottom, Bernard Sumner and Peter Hook), and surely woondest, Tiny Tim.





"I styled Tina into a sex symbol—I made it happen. She'd stroke that mike—I was the one who told her to do that. But do I get the credit? Shit! I'm always the bad guy."

# IKE'S STORY

**T**he word on the street was that Ike was dead. No one knew for sure, but word was that Ike Turner had met a Hollywood-had-guy death. Shot—by who? police, dope dealers, a pimp, some dude he owed money; who cared?—the devil himself was gone, apparently. Tina could say whatever she wanted.

Then last December, an item in *The Los Angeles Times*: Ike Turner contacts Teena Marie about a possible collaboration. "It was to be another Ike and Tina revue," said Marie's former manager Allan Mink. "He talked on and on about a national tour, but it didn't make any sense. He didn't even leave us a phone number, so afterwards we just laughed. A part of me now feels sorry for the guy."

So he wasn't dead. Instead of meeting an unmourned death in some nameless alley or fleabag L.A. hotel, here was Ike, recent Villain of the Piece in the wide-open book of recollections (sort of a *Hubby Dearest*)—and no patron saint to the California tax people either—making a comeback, or at least remerging, sort of. The sweet sweetback of rock, who put the S-E-X into Tina's swagger, who cut what is arguably the first rock record, "Rocket 88," in 1951; who discovered B.B. King and Little Junior Parker, and who once hired a kid he saw a lot of potential in, Jimi Hendrix by name; Ike, who designed himself into the perfect backup guy after he finished designing what was at the time the perfect incarnation of an R&B rock and roll crossover band, had dissolved into obscurity not completely obscured by, merely, oblivion. If medium-range industry people hadn't been laughing at him, though, you wouldn't have noticed even that spark in the fog.

Ike was not dead, just forgotten. And not entirely that, either—more like laying very low and trying to be forgotten.

**W**hen I started looking for him, I first checked the L.A. county jails, because I heard that's where he was currently residing. The jails didn't have him. Again, just more mythology, but once again, not implausible: Ike had been arrested and charged five times—for guns, assault, drugs, and most recently, shooting a newsboy in the leg (although the "newsboy" was 49 and had a gun, too)—but he spent only 30 days inside, on the drug rap. He beat everything else.

Then I contacted his old record companies—labels like Kent, United Artists, and EMI (formerly Liberty)—to see if Ike was still collecting royalties. Found, instead, only stonewalls. Quick to remind me that he had been off their label for years, spokespersons said they knew nothing about royalties. Their coldness on

the telephone spoke volumes: it didn't matter if Ike was part of the "T&T" team that sold millions of records—today he was an outcast, an untouchable. A leper to he kept out of the industry.

Even Paul Krasnow, Elektra's current chairman of the board, who rose to prominence after producing several Turner albums at Blue Thumb, took a dim view of my search. "Why do you want to do an Ike story?" he asked, in his stylish, charcoal-toned, 21st-floor Manhattan office. "I haven't heard from Ike in years, and it wouldn't bother me if a few more years passed."

Finally, I got my first solid lead. A friend gave me the name of Ike's New York lawyer, Phillip Cowan. "Isn't it time I told his side of the story?" I asked Cowan. "You've seen the articles and interviews with Tina. There wasn't one word from Ike." But Cowan was uncooperative.

"We've gotten dozens of offers for interviews—People, 20/20," he shot back, "but we've turned them all down. Ike's not doing any press right now. Besides, I couldn't get in touch with him even if I wanted to. I have to wait 'til he calls me. I don't even have his number."

I went to L.A. where I called R&B legend Johnny Otis, who happened to be doing a tribute to Ike on his weekly radio show that evening and invited me to the station. Between playing the cuts "Proud Mary" and "River Deep—Mountain High," he made other contacts: "Ike was a very important man in American music," he said. "The texture and flavor of R&B owe a lot to him. He defined how to put the Fender bass into that music. He was a great innovator. I like Ike."

But Otis, and the dozens of listeners who called in, had only heard rumors about Ike's present life. No one knew anything else.

Calls to former members of Ike's band, such as Clifford Solomon, Sam Rhodes, and Bobby John, proved futile. But among the fruitless leads was the story of how Bolic Sound—the "Taj Mahal," Ike's studio complex in Inglewood, California—had been torched shortly before he disappeared.

I took my first trip to Inglewood the following day, but before visiting with the police, I stopped at La Brea and Fairview, site of the infamous "Taj Mahal," an anonymously given nickname for Turner's version of the Pleasuredom: his legendary state-of-the-art studio headquarters. Today, there are no plaques bearing their silent, stoical testament. Instead, painters were putting the finishing touches on a new office building, and a sign proudly announced the opening of a beauty parlor.

At police headquarters, department officials talked openly about Ike's run-ins with the law, provided addi-



Michael Ochs Archives

ditional contacts, and most important, told me to call the California Fiscal Tax Board, where I discovered that Ike owed the state \$12,802 in back taxes for the period 1975-79. According to Will Bush, the board's PR spokesman, a lien had been placed on his property, and while Bush insisted that debt was sizable enough to justify prosecution, he confidently added, "Turner's not in California. No way. If he was, we would get him."

I visited Ike and Tina's old house, perched on a hill near Ray Charles's place in a wealthy black enclave called Baldwin Hills; made inquiries at the L.A. Probation Department; and met with more of Turner's old friends. But no matter who I talked to—Bonnie Bramlett (as a teenager she covered her face with Man-Tan and shimmied onstage as an Ikeite in the "T&T" Revue), Joel Bihari, a Memphis band manager (he worked for Howlin' Alperin of Kent Records, even Ike's old barber, Dwight—the message was always the same. As Alperin emphasized, "Forget it, there's no finding this guy. He's a loner, a real elusive type. He could be anywhere.")

After seven days of getting nowhere, I was disgusted. I had a clearer picture of Ike Turner, his character, the contributions he made to rock, and the fast-lane life that led to his downfall. But that was it.



Two days before my scheduled departure from L.A., a friend located Tina's sister, Eileen Silico. (At a *Saturday Night Live* party earlier this year, Tina pointedly refused to talk about Ike—and her management people have taken the same stance.) I didn't expect Eileen to speak too flattering about Ike, yet she might know some other Ikelettes and other women in the Turner constellation.

The seventh time I telephoned Silico, I simply asked, "Don't you know Vanetta Fields, Robbie Montgomery, and a few other Ikelettes? Can you give me their phone numbers?"

"I can't do that without asking them," she replied. "That wouldn't be right."

Then, without any prompting, Silico added, "Why don't you call Ike's lawyer, Nate Tabor? He's in Burbank somewhere."

It was Friday afternoon. I quickly called, hoping not to lose him. Once Tabor got on the line, he seemed intrigued by my being from New York and only wanted to talk about Steinbrenner's dismantling of the Yankees. When the conversation finally turned to Ike, Tabor dryly said, "Yeah, I have his number. You want to reach him? I'll get him to call you later today."

I waited in the hotel room all day. Nothing. It got late. Noticing the disturbance Tabor had at night, I went to bed. There was silence tomorrow morning.

The following morning Tabor wasn't at home. My phone rang a few times, but each call was only another disappointment. Cursing my luck, I left the room to visit a few boutiques on Melrose Avenue, calling my hotel every hour, but to no avail. The afternoon faded away. I returned to my room about 11 that night, tired and totally disgusted.

Then the phone rang.

I hear from my friends you've been looking for me." The voice was unmistakably southern, yet it smacked of the urban ghetto. His speech was slurred, rapid-fire, and he stuttered. Even without seeing him, I sensed the man was looking over his shoulder as he asked, "What do you want?"

"My magazine wants to do an article on you. I know you haven't done any press in five years, but everyone's been slamming the shit out of you. Why don't you clear up a few things?"

"I'm not going to talk about Ike and Tina's sex life—it's not me."

After I convinced him that I wasn't interested in that, his voice mellowed.

"How's tomorrow at 5? Give me your address, I'll meet you there. . . . I promise."

I spent most of the next day wondering if Ike would indeed appear. All week, people had praised Turner for honoring commitments. Clifford Solomon told me, "Ike always lived up to his word. With him you didn't need a contract—a handshake was good enough. Why, there were times the band would go out on the road and these club owners didn't pay us our right-on money. Ike always made up the difference. He was a tough son of a bitch to work for, a real perfectionist. But he always looked out for his band. His word was gold."

Still, I had my doubts, so I waited on the street for him.

At exactly 5 o'clock, a bluish-grey Cadillac Fleetwood pulled to the curb, and a striking, long-haired black woman peered out the passenger-side window. "I nod you Ed?" she asked, as the driver sized me up. I nodded, and the driver leaned over. Without shaking my hand, he simply said, "I'm Ike."

Wearing a white Yohji Yamamoto jumpsuit complete with chest flaps and metal hardware, the goateed, wavy-haired Ike Turner looks like a cross between a Japanese aviator and Sammy Davis Jr. We are sitting at a corner table in the Old World Cafe on Sunset. The 54-year-old Turner had been carrying a Louis Vuitton satchel, driving gloves, and Porsche-Carrera sunglasses, but the moment we sat down, he freed his hands for another purpose: to fondle his companion's thighs under the table. She softly asks him what he's going to order. Not bothering to look at the menu, he tells her to decide for him.

"I love surrounding myself with beautiful women, I always have," says Ike. "Tina's said I always messed around with other women, and that's true, I won't deny it. If you want to set a trap for me, bait it with pussy—you'll get me every time."

Laughing uproariously, Ike kisses the woman's neck. She chuckles, too. A singer who's hoping to star in another *Eye* revue, she gently scolds Ike for not introducing her. Coquettishly closing her cobalt-blue-frosted eyelids and rearranging a tight-fitting blue suede minidress that emphasizes her voluptuous curves, Barbara Cole smiles seductively.

"Ike, baby, I'm gonna get you the shrimp and steak. And how 'bout a salad and some soup?"

Nodding his head submissively, Ike lights a Salem and stops a waiter to order a few drinks. As Barbara rattles off her dinner requests, Ike rambles on about Tina.

"That woman will say whatever she thinks you want to hear. I don't care what she says about me, I'll always be her friend. If the devil was real, it was real. When I saw Tina do 'What's Love Got to Do With It?' I picked up the phone and called her. 'Hey, Bo [short for Bullock, her maiden name], that's a cute song, I

really like it.' Well, that was it. I ain't saw nothing else she did that I like.

"One time I got pissed off about something I read. I wrote her a letter. 'Why don't you talk about you and stop talking about me and the kids.' I told her she was hurting the kids and embarrassing them. The boys had nothing to do with us."

"But it's years ago that I had a temper. I don't regret nothing I've ever done, absolutely nothing, man, because it took all of that to make me what I am today—and I love me today, I really do. Yeah, I hit her, but I didn't hit her more than the average guy beats his wife. The truth is, our life was no different from the guy next door's. It's been exaggerated. People buy bad news, dirty news. If she says I abused her, maybe I did."

Responding to reports that he fired bullets into Tina's house after she split, Ike explodes, "That's a fucking lie. I'll tell you one thing, if I was the bigger people think I am, I'd go up to her house and blow it up. If I shot at her house, I'd have come into the house and shot her."

The anger in his voice subsides. No longer punching at the air with his cigarette, he takes a few spoonfuls of soup. His other hand remains semi-invisible in Barbara's lap. Ike laughs again and insists, "I could have a lot of dislike in me for Tina, but I don't." Sure, I was with other women, but she never knew I was in the studio with them. I wasn't going to embarrass her. I saw her in the bed with a guy. I've seen her get up out of the bed and let the guy she was in love with go to bed with another woman. She'd go downstairs while he balled her.

"I wasn't out to hurt her; we was tight. I was happy to organize things, man, to get us out on the road, play my guitar in the background. She could be the star. I never thought that anything would come between us—it was trust. Man, I have nothing in my heart against her at all. I never thought she would betray my confidence. I had no contract between Ike and Tina. I could've put money aside for Ike, but I never took anything. I only wanted to do for her and the kids. My bills were running me \$35,000 to \$75,000 a month—I was up 24 hours a day, not because I really wanted to."

"But you know, man, I'd do it all over again. I don't care if Tina was the star. My whole thing isn't stardom, I just care about getting people off. [His voice rising again] Damn the dollar! Shit, you have to have money. I've been hungry. But my thing was seeing people come into clubs and saying, 'Make me happy, do what you want with me. I'm yours.'

"And Tina being the sex symbol, that's what happened. People think that came from the visual part of an Ike and Tina show, but man, that's not it. I styled her that way—I made it happen. I gave the drummer the signal, and it sounded like a gunshot. The lights came down on her, there was no spotlight on me. She'd stroke that mike and shut like that!—was the one who told her to do that. Anytime you ever saw her or thelettes do on stage came from me. But do I get the credit? Shit! I'm always the bad guy."

**B**efore the sex, drugs, and showdowns with the law, in Sin City. For even as a youngster in Clarkdale, Mississippi, Ike Luster Turner saw himself as a bad-assed hustler. The son of a preacher and a seamstress, he helped his parents get through the Depression by working on neighbors' chicken farms. At age 8, he fired of collecting eggs and began his lifelong search for bigger and better payoffs.

"First I sold scrap iron, did odd jobs, any hustle I could think of to have a few extra quarters in my pocket," purrs Turner, this bit of nostalgia bringing a mischievous smile to his face. "Then I ran away from home, to Memphis, where I worked as a hallboy at the Hotel Peabody. I wound up sleeping on Coca-Cola crates, so I think I stayed away for about four days." Pointing at a bread basket on the table, he muses, "In those days, even a crust of bread tasted like steak."

Still gripped by wanderlust even after thrashings from his mother, Beatrice, he was soon skipping school to hang out at the local pool room. On one of these visits,

he first heard Pine Top Joe Willie, a piano player who mesmerized him. "That cat could play. Man, did he fascinate me. It was a fantasy. I could never play like him. . . . I finally helped him with his equipment, and he showed me a few notes. Shoot, my mother gave me money to take music lessons. I'd take it, and when I came home I'd show her what Pine Top taught me."

After spinning platters at a nearby radio station, the 13-year-old Turner quit school to play piano behind Sonny Boy Williamson and Robert Nighthawk. His lack of formal education would eventually haunt him. As Ike sheepishly admits, "That's why I liked being in the background. I was really scared to talk to the press."

Obsessed with the blues in the early '50s, he cut "Rockin' 88" with saxophonist Jackie Brenston in Memphis and was then hired by the Bihari brothers, local show-biz agents, as a talent scout.

"We first saw like when he was 16, playing with B.B. King, and my brother Jules was so impressed, he bought him a Black Roadmaster and some clothes," recalls Joel Bihari. "Ike did a great job for us, but he was a country boy. We brought him in, and he just couldn't take city life. He got married, then left for East St. Louis to form his own band. He told me he was going back there to become a star."

Choreographing each move of his newly formed ikettes, a pride of shapely, scantly clad singers, like became the toast of St. Louis in the late 1950s. At clubs like the Imperial, Manhattan, and D'Lysa, he displayed a talent that would later lead him to Bill Graham's Win-

*"I love sexy girls, but let me tell you, I'll never marry no more as long as I'm chocolate. If there is anything called reincarnation, I want God to make me a longer neck. That way I'd do my own self."*

terland, the Fillmore, and a tour with the Stones, because the R&B revue had crossover appeal: it attracted whites as well as blacks.

As Bonnie Bramlett coos, "Ike's shows put others to shame. I saw them in Granite City [her hometown in Illinois] when I was 15 [1959], and they were so hot, I could only dream of becoming an ikette. My mother didn't exactly like that idea, my being white, but Ike came to the house and charmed her. He promised her that everything would be okay. He was a real gentleman, like died right by me. In my heart I'm still an ikette."

Even at age 16, Ike had a way with women. Decidedly poor for this sake, he turned to another passion: "I started wheeling when I was 5 years old. There was this Miss Boozie, I'd feed her chickens every morning on my way to school. She'd give me a nickel a week if she could put me on top of her and show me how to move."

"Look man, I've been married 10 times. I started getting married when I was 14. First there was Edna Dean Stewart. A few months later it was Velma Dishman, then Dolores Ward. I don't remember her last name, but then it was Alice. . . . People can believe this or not, I don't care. You gave a preacher \$2, the papers cost \$3, that was it. In those days blacks didn't bother with divorces."

"When I was in St. Louis and Tina started hanging out at the clubs I was playing, she knew what I was doing with women. She knew how I am. There were no surprises ever. She was with me four years before we started going together. Every time I bought a dress for the mother of my two kids, I got her one."

"If I really had to talk shit about Tina, I could. She and her saxophone-player boyfriend [Raymond Hall, one of the Kings of Rhythm, an early Ike Turner Band] were living in my house in East St. Louis. He got Tina pregnant. I'd get mad at him, 'cause he'd make Tina go

downstairs while he went upstairs to ball another woman. Where does she come off sounding so innocent these days?"

"Tina even got girls for me. I didn't do anything with her that I wasn't doing when we first met. She'd get ikettes for me. I was with them, she knew that. There were times I'd be on the stage and I'd see a pretty girl out there, and I'd say to her, 'See that girl? Tell her to meet me over at the house. See that one? Go put her in the car. Tina did this for four years."

"I was never phony. She knew what was going on. When we were living together later on, she did the same thing. I didn't threaten or force her to do this. There were times in the studio she'd bring me and the girl I was with food. Why is she so angry now? She never was then."

Ike winces as he lights another cigarette and half-heartedly stabs at his steak, his gaunt, light-brown cheeks tense with anger. "Let me tell you this," he says, shaking his head violently. "As God is my judge, of all my wives, Tina's the only one I was never really married to."

Ike continues. "We went to Tijuana, sat in this round booth with [legend] Esther Jones, Bobby John, Rhonda Graham, Tina, and me, bus driver. This girl who was shooting pictures in the place came up to us and asked, 'Do you want to get married?' We said 'Yeah.' He married all six of us at the same time. He wasn't no preacher. We just paid him for the pictures." (But band member Bobby John recalls it differently. "I really felt everything was prearranged. We walked into this office and this guy, I don't know if he was a preacher or not, performed a short ceremony.")

However their nuptial bonds were sealed in 1962, Ike's friends remember him being enthralled by Tina. She wasn't as big-breasted or as glamorous as his other women, but this didn't matter to Turner. Even before Tina became the Revue's lead singer and brought "A Fool in Love" to the top of the R&B charts in 1960, he believed she was "the most talented woman on the planet," according to St. Louis songwriter/musician Oliver Sain. "I wasn't all that impressed, but to like she was Wonder Woman."

Echoing this assessment, Elektra's Robert Krasnow says, "Ike saw her as the ultimate woman, as a Venus, the perfect girl. It was a fantasy of his and she played to this image for him, or was a partner to it because she wanted the same things he did. Tina's a very smart woman. She saw what like was conjuring up for her. I don't see how she could've put as much time into it if she didn't want success as much as like did."

In 1965, Krasnow arranged for Ike and Tina to sing "River Deep, Mountain High" on Phil Specter's *Philips* label. The song fared badly in the U.S. but was a sensation in England. Upon hearing it, the Stones were so impressed, they invited Ike and Tina to tour with them in Europe. They gave the TTV Revue notoriety in white rock circles. By the time like and Tina rejoined the Stones for a U.S. tour in 1969, their raunchy stage act was big box office. Tina's dancing and simulated orgasms on stage earned her the title "the World's Greatest Heartbreaker"—a moniker that brought record companies to their knees. Liberty, United Artists, and Capitol all vied for the Turners' services. And like, ever the manipulator, jumped from one "exclusive" deal to another.

**W**ith millions of dollars pouring in, Ike went on a good-time spree. Besides hosting dozens of coke parties, acquiring apartment buildings, and giving away cars to his favorite ladies, he built his decadently palatial recording studio complex in Inglewood, California, not far from the Forum.

How the two-story, brick Bolic Sound—a tag originally intended as a tribute to Tina, née Bullock—got its nickname, the Tah Mahal, remains part of the Turner folklore. Bolic was built to resemble a castle, and narcotics detectors from the Los Angeles Police Department and Inglewood, California, may have used the tag as a code name. They constantly watched the place during the late '70s and frequently busted in. Or the

tribute might've been coined one hell-raising night by one of the sultans of sound—such as Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Duane Allman, and Little Richard—who recorded and partied there.

In any event, the munificent description was apt. Visitors were allowed past the studio's 3-inch thick front doors and through a passageway lined with security cameras before entering a labyrinth of interconnecting sound rooms, each paneled with a double layer of African mahogany and carpeted in pastel-colored wool or antique Persian. Along with a bed or a bean bag chair, the rooms contained a variety of musical instruments, toiletries, and a wide range of booze.

Farther down a narrow hallway was another reinforced steel door. Visitors had to punch a secret code number into a wall phone to gain admittance to the master control room—the sanctum sanctorum. There, banks of video screens monitored activities throughout the building, including the cubicles, business office, game room, and upstairs bedrooms, and also whatever was happening on the street. Engineers kept watch over the two \$100,000 sound boards, with state-of-the-art IBM mix-memorizers, an Even-tide digital delay system, and other flickering gadgetry. It was so Strange-love.

"The place was straight out of *Star Trek*," remembers an Ingleside police sergeant, after estimating that Bolic Sound contained more than \$2 million worth of recording equipment. "Once we got into the place, we understood why pimpin' was always lining up outside, waiting for people who never came out. Bolic was our neighborhood Disneyland."

Delaney Bramlett, who regularly visited the studio after splitting with his wife Bonnie, was equally awed by Bolic's trappings. One of the privileged few with unrestricted access to the upstairs bedrooms and playrooms, he was often asked to rouse the Tai's Master after an all-nighter. And as he tiptoed past foot-tall Romanesque statues, gold-plated tables, chairs with penis-shaped arms, and murals out of the *Kama Sutra*, this former country boy had one thought. "The studio was something else; you thought you were in the Arabian Nights, or at least the Waldorf Astoria."

Presently hoping to make a record with Ike, Delaney for one won't comment on the bacchanalian scenes that went down in that garish retreat. But Tina Turner, a former resident of her ex-husband's digs, suggests that Ike's penchant for overhead mirrors and gold-braided curtains went beyond mere interior decorating. Tina simply calls Bolic's top floor "the Whorehouse." She has pithily described how he moved one of his girlfriends into the studio and stayed at Bolic for weeks at a time after he staged one of his now notorious rampages at home. As these scenes increased from 1973 to 1975, Ike rarely left the Whorehouse to go back to his equally outrageous Baldwin Hills ranchhouse, with its guitar-shaped table standing beside a waterfall that fell into a living-room pond filled with exotic Japanese fish. If Ike tired of his lady friend at the time, he'd dismiss her to an adjoining apartment building he owned and find other amours. The studio was one long walk to the wild side.

"I stopped going there because it seemed like a dope house," recalls Cliford Solomon, once the bandleader of Ike's Kings of Rhythm. "Besides the cocaine and other drugs, there were a whole lot of chicks running around. There were so many disreputable people there. Ike had this .357 Magnum on a console in the control room. He was always showing these kinds of things off. The police started to watch the place, and since I had started to work for Ray Charles, the last thing I needed was to get busted there."

"The drugs ate away at Ike," says Lee Maxie, Ike's "spiritual counselor" for a number of years. He cocaine enhanced his being an enemy to himself. He has a special love for people, but this love is for selfish reasons. He took advantage of people, especially women. Ike's a devil. He used drugs for sex purposes. He had a studio filled with women. I'd tell him this was wrong, but he wanted me to meet them. He was friends with this one really famous black singer, and he tried



"That whole story is one damn lie," blisters Ike emphatically, grabbing my arm. Other restaurant patrons turn to stare at us. But like continues shouting. "I didn't want to go to work that night, and Tina hated doing the show without me. I later changed my mind, and when I walked in, there was Tina with her eyes back in her head. After I found a hospital to admit her, it seemed as if this doctor had stopped working on her, so I said, 'Hey, Bo, you coward, you chicken shit, if you want to kick the bucket, why didn't you jump off an overpass.' I was kidding. I was kidding. I told her, 'You don't see me taking the short way out, yet you want me to believe you're more woman than I am a man.' I was trying to get her tongue moving. That's why I don't like talking to the damn press."

In 1976, Tina split. And Ike says he "panicked." "When we broke up I was scared, very scared, because there was no way I could pay those bills. Ike and Tina's name was always bigger than Ike and Tina. Even with those bills, she could stay home and comb wigs and shit. Yeah, I was afraid. We had clubs signed up, record deals."

Gritting his teeth, Ike turns towards Barbara for solace. She vacantly stares back.

"I was scared because at first I thought her leaving wouldn't be a big thing—she'd come back. I still don't know why she left me. She even wrote me a letter saying she wanted everything the same, that we'd work together again. I didn't know what to do with anything, I told her no. After a lengthy pause I guess she just didn't want to be named Turner anymore."

The divorce edged like the brink of bankruptcy and gave him his first sour taste of the American legal system. "Tina cried about splitting with nothing, but man, her attorneys worked it out so I got all the pink elephants. They had asked me what I needed, and I said, 'What about half of *Anaheim*?' Ja 50 percent share of their apartment building. Instead, they gave me a big mirage, the things that didn't mean much, like the mortgaged studio, and all of the Ike and Tina royalties from United Artists, which were \$1 million in the red. They gave me nothing."

Embittered, Ike retreated to his studio. Many of his friends deserted him. He surrounded himself with a new set of characters. However, the all-night parties that invariably revolved around sex and coke didn't ease his torment. Not knowing "where my next dollar was coming from," Ike was going crazy.

"I couldn't believe it. People who were supposed to be my buddies took off," complains Ike. "For example, this guy Mike Stewart, who was the head of United Artists [now the president of CBS Songs], was always grabbing and hugging me when Tina was around. I never heard from that man once when we broke up. Some folks have been there for me, giving me money when I needed it. But these others, like Bub Krason—I made so much money I asked for that man. A few months ago I called him up and asked for \$1,500. It's the only time I ever asked him for something. I'm still waiting to hear from the dude."

Remembered that his reputation wasn't too savory, Ike looks me straight in the eye, and announces, "I liked coke, who don't? I've always been quiet, but this stuff makes me talk. Before the divorce I was giving the stuff away. I was getting \$56,000 a month from one investment alone. Why did I have to sell drugs? When I came to New York I'd set up my hotel room with these big bowls filled with coke in every room, just giving it to people. I didn't know no better man. Ben, I was giving away \$52,000 worth of shit every fucking six weeks, ask God."

In March 1980, the police moved on the Taj Mahal, L.A. narks, together with a SWAT team, smashed through the front doors. They discovered a live hand grenade and reportedly found like hovering over a toilet, surrounded by several empty plastic bags and holding 7 grams of cocaine.

Two weapons charges were quickly dismissed, but a Torrance Superior Court judge ruled that like would have to stand trial for possessing cocaine. Initially, it didn't seem as if the judge was too impressed by like's still

### "As God is my judge, of all my wives, Tina's the only one I was never legally married to."

to get me to come over to her house. One Sunday morning he called me over to the studio, and he had the curtains drawn 'round his big bedroom. It was so embarrassing to hear what was going on. I stepped outside and turned on a sermon I had on this tape recorder I'd brought over. Later, she just sat there, hitting that damn pipe and shit. A base pipe, cocaine. Freebase. They were hitting it, every son of a bitch there did it."

Meanwhile, the police maintained their vigil. Ike had already been arrested once at Bolic in 1974 (along with his business manager Rhonda Graham) and charged with possessing "blue boxes"—multifrequency devices permitting long-distance calls to be made without the knowledge of the phone company. But he had been cleared of the charges. Afterward, the police set up their watch as the limousines came and went from the studio, but could only harass the chauffeurs or ticket Ike's Mercedes, Lamborghini and custom-made Rolls-Royce.

**A**nnie Mae Bullock, the sharecropper's daughter who became Tina Turner, grew up on the poor side of the tracks in Nutbush, Tennessee. Before there was "What's Love Got to Do With It?" and "Private Dance," and all the monumental—and sentimental—success that accompanied Tina's triumphal return, there was the Ike and Tina Turner Revue, there were dues to be paid, hard years leading to better ones, effort yielding success. There was great music and a great act. And there was life with like.

Behind the flash, Cliford Solomon recounts, "The band members didn't like the way like treated Tina. He'd hit her, terribly. Her eyes were often blackened. Once, like bought her a dress with bird leathers that he wanted her to wear on TV. She wore it before the show, so like was enraged. The next day she was wearing sunglasses."

Exhausted by these assaults, like's promiscuity, and his mounting use of cocaine, Tina tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. As she lay dying in a hospital bed, like reportedly called her a "motherfucker" for abandoning the Revue.

blemish-free legal record or his legendary musical accomplishments. But at the conclusion of the two-month trial, the judge found Ike guilty, yet only sentenced him to 30 days in the L.A. county jail and three years' probation.

After that nothing much was heard from Ike. The divorce proceedings had exposed him as a wife beater, and now he was labeled a drug dealer. The heavies in the business stopped coming to Bolic. As activity dropped off there, Ike was forced to sell some of the equipment. The divorce from Tina had sent him reeling, financially. Besides losing a three-record deal with United Artists and his share of \$1.5 million in advance bookings in 1975, he was forced to sell several apartment buildings to meet the terms of the divorce settlement. Strapped, Ike cancelled a \$30,000-a-year insurance policy on Bolic in 1980 and put the property up for sale to fend off foreclosure on a \$250,000 loan from a Beverly Hills bank.

"His investments were in such disarray, he didn't know what he owned," says Joel Bharat. "He called me after he and Tina split up and asked me to help him with his problems. So my wife and me spent a lot of time at Bolic going through the books to help straighten things out. She discovered that he was a partner in this 380-unit apartment building in Anaheim. We took him out to see it—he had never seen it before. And of course he was amazed. It was like he was back in Mississippi. His eyes opened wide, and he said, 'What's a spook like me doing owning a place like this?'"

Bolic, though, was Ike's obsession. "Ike had his cars, maybe a half million dollars' worth, and three or four diamond rings, all of which looked like four ice cubes," says Clifford Solomon. "But the studio was his first love. That's where he had put all of his energies."

Around noon on January 20, 1981, as he prepared for a meeting with a group of prospective buyers of the studio, Ike was in his small apartment behind the studio when sirens disrupted the afternoon calm. After rushing into the street to see what the commotion was about, he called his friend Maxie and told him, "You'd better come on down here, the studio's on fire."

Smoke billowed from the building for the next 18 hours. According to a fire department investigator, the blaze was clearly a case of arson. It was discovered that someone had poured a flammable fluid along a narrow hallway outside Ike's bedroom. The fire spread downward, knifing through the sheets of mahogany paneling. Because the studio was such a maze of small rooms and secret passageways, firemen couldn't reach parts of the building and were forced to watch the building burn until it was nothing more than a gutted shell.

Standing on a curb with one of his girlfriends, Ann Thomas, Lee Walker, and the prospective buyers of the studio, Ike looked around dejectedly as fire consumed his last major possession. As the studio was reduced to ashes, Maxie reproached Ike for "living a life of sin" that "inevitably resulted in you, a den of iniquity, burning to the ground," like dropped his head. "What's going to happen to me next?"

On April 13, 1981, Ike got his answer when a burst of gunfire rang out from his Ingleswood home. A 49-year-old newspaper carrier lay bleeding on the front lawn. Ike was arrested for shooting the man after he reportedly kicked Turner's dog. A jury trial the following year cleared Ike of the assault charge, which could have sent him to prison for seven years. But these repeated arrests had thoroughly soiled his reputation. So, in 1982, Mr. Flamboyance, the rock founding father who had traveled with the Stones and made Tina T. a household name, quietly crept into the shadows of some mysterious underground world.

In the Old World Cafe, Ike's hand slithers across Barbara's bare back. She giggles as his ring-clad fingers move lower and lower. With certain pleasures in mind, he's lost all interest in his food. But Ike is trying to set the record straight about dope.

"Would I do that again? Not dope, but let me tell you this, man, I don't have a drug problem. I do as much dope as the average police do. Not one time have I



*"What's bringing me back  
now is I started to miss the stage.*

*I've been underground,  
but I'm going to come on top with  
this new revue, like a  
damn volcano."*

been found with any dope, not one. The police came into my studio and said I was putting dope down the toilet. They're big liars. The Ingleswood police couldn't get into my studio. It took them 18 minutes to get in there. I was upstairs watching them [on the security monitors]. I would up getting three years probation, 30 days in jail, for what? For nothing, man. They found some dope in the recording studio. How you going to go to a department store and put the box in jail for something that's in the sewer? Man, that's not right."

Discreetly, Ike shoves aside his plate of food. Staring blankly ahead, he remains silent.

Two women come into the room and wave at him.

"Hey, like, how's it going?" one exclaims. "I haven't seen you in a while . . . I played the *Lingerie* last night. Here's some tickets, come on by."

Smiling again, Ike blows each of the women a kiss. "Hollywood," he raves. "I love it." Then turning more somber, he says, "I came back here 2½ years ago from East St. Louis. I've had some problems. A few guys with guns stole \$13,000 from me, one of my four houses was robbed. Things are working out now. But when I first came out here it was like being lost, man, just like searching for something when you don't know what you're looking for."

"I don't know why these things happen to me. Maybe it's envy, hate. I don't know why these stories about me appear. I don't bother anybody, I stay at home all the time. The last 10 years haven't been that good. I had to deal with my own self, face up to my insecurities, and find a counter so I could stand them off and get back into music."

His voice trails off. And his pained expression mirrors a keen sense of disbelief.

"Everything I read has been exaggerated, exaggerated to the point that it makes it hard for me to talk to

record companies," he snaps. "It makes it hard for me to even get a start. I know people think I'm a gangster, a devil. The only thing they ever saw was this stone-faced guy in the background playing his guitar, and now they read shit like 'Ike Turner shoots paperboy who's 8 years old.'"

Ike becomes so agitated he stutters over every word. Increasingly difficult to understand, he ignores my entreaties to calm down and instead screeches.

"No one who read those headlines knew the paperboy was 49 years old, and that the girl I married, Ann Thomas, had been hit by him and told to 'shut up, bitch'. That guy was beating on my dog when I wasn't around. A few months later when he came back, our daughter [Mia, 16, who like fathered with Thomas while still living with Tina] came upstairs and told me, 'Daddy, the man's downstairs that was beating mama.'"

"When I asked him to explain what happened, he said, 'Why the fuck don't you ask your woman?' To talk that way, he had to have a piece with him, so I went upstairs and got mine. When I got back out front, he said, 'Are you going to shoot me?' I fired a shot into the air. He ran, jumped over a fence, and that's when I think he cut his ankle. That was it. But the whole world, everybody, thinks like Turner shot a poor little newsboy."

Once his rage ebbs, I ask him if incidents like that are responsible for his disappearing into some nowhere.

"Look, man, what I've done is nothing, what I'm going to do is what's important," he replies, again the cool hipster. "I wasn't going to go out on some stage and make an ass of myself. When I walk out there I'm going to be glad, I'm going to get my nut. I know when I get off. If I don't get my nut—you know, orgasm—I don't mess with it."

Undisturbed by the sexual reference, Barbara suddenly interrupts. "Working with like you don't just sing, it's something you have to build from your soul. Ike has multitalents. He's total electricity."

Nodding immodestly, Ike continues, "It's like Martin Luther King. I didn't know him, but when he said, 'I have a dream,' it lifted me and Tina right out of the bed. He put bumps all over me—and that's what I have to get to when I do something—my nut. Nobody's ever heard the real me."

"What's bringing me back now is I started to miss the stage. My studio burning down was a great thing to

*continued on p. 71*

# WHO'S THAT GIRL?

Annie Lennox is half of the Eurythmics but more than half of the curiosity, the mystery. The first queen of the androgynous generation (unless you count Boy George), she is as sensitive as she is extraordinary. And therein lies a good part of the answer. . . .

Article by Simon Garfield

Color photography by James Hamilton



**T**he day *Be Yourself Tonight* lay tightly canned and set for the presses, Dave Stewart phoned Annie Lennox. "The funny thing is, Annie, I feel we've only just scratched the surface." "Me too," she replied. "I've got so much more. Where shall we go now?"

Their latest LP was the fourth official Eurythmics release, discounting an unhappy remix of their state-of-the-art *Touch* album and the 1984 sound track, and their approach was still one of charming, pumping and seemingly naive enthusiasm. "I wake up in the mornings now and just feel so good about everything," Lennox continued to Stewart. "I just think: 'Exciting! Exciting!'"

Stewart remembers another phone call from happier times. "Annie rang me up about four years ago and she was crying and all over the place. She'd been to a club in town and it was full of Blitz London people. She'd forced herself to go along to keep up with what was happening. She stood on her own for ages and then she started crying. Eventually someone came over, I can't remember who . . ."

"It was Boy George," confirms Lennox. "The George who'd come to tourists [the Eurythmics' previous incarnation] concerts as a young lad—when he was only about 15. He came over and I thought it was funny that the one who looks most extreme is actually the least of a poser. You know, people like us have gone through an awful lot of feeling exterior, of feeling very alienated. Actually we never fit in with the crowd."

Lennox wrote a song around that time called "Never Gonna Cry Again," but life refused to imitate art: the crying continued for years, continuing still. Three years after their heart-to-heart in that club she and George shared a *Newsweek* cover—success—but she was still far from happy. Her wailing bouts have been very public, well-milked affairs. As sensitive as she is, and as much as her life is seemingly lived in a fish bowl, she is strong and refuses to drown in those tears.

When "Sweet Dreams" propelled the Eurythmics into universal stardom, the public by and large got the mistaken impression that the group were overnight sensa-

tions. Untrue. *The Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* LP was the second—first American—release for the Eurythmics, but it came only for the Annie-Lennox-Dave Stewart musical partnership (four others had been released as the Tourists and *In the Garden* was the Eurythmics debut). Neither has it been smooth all the way. But now here she is with Stewart, philosophical and confident as hell again, both of them basking by the sun on the balcony of a pricey rented apartment overlooking London's fashionable Montagu Square. "I've never felt more in control," she asserts as her lawyer and manager haggle over fine points in the next room. "Well, not in control exactly, but I can see things more clearly now. Like all the chaotic things can actually be turned around to something so useful. And I'm not afraid as I was; I was very anxiety-ridden."

Certainly she can afford to put a brave face on it all now—the new album has swiftly made up for any ground lost over the last 18 months, her name is hot and splashed into the hippest conversations again, and she's fighting off interview requests by the bucket-load—but she stresses that more substance lies in her claims of self-confidence than ever before. This, Lennox says as she chomps into a plate of steaming beans on toast, is the real me. Unmasked and wig-free. No personal question unanswered.

Lennox was 30 last Christmas Day, but she looks younger now than on some of her dark, slightly rebellious Tourists poses of six years ago. She's tugged out in a close-cut shiny black vest and apparently seamless and possibly black trousers (somehow must have recently confirmed that she looked great in black). Her hair is bleached blonde all over, with dark and shaven sides; she sports a pinkish eye-shadow-and-lipstick combo, and a long bulbous, globular metallic necklace winds loosely many times around her throat.

Thick gold earrings are here, too, but they're worn by Dave Stewart. He's got a granddad vest dyed grey, old jeans, and that patented light-brown straggly mop top tied into a tight ponytail at the back. The wayward beard hasn't changed much either (somehow must have once told him he looked good in hair).



Their accents have thinned since he left Sunderland and she Aberdeen, in northern England and Scotland respectively, but both still hang in there somewhere. As does a rather staggering passion for honesty and confession.

"Annie's one of those people like a pressure cooker," offers Stewart. "You ring her up one day and she's doing everything, then the next . . ."

"It's just something I have to deal with," Lennox explains. "I am a very extreme person. Obviously someone that performs and writes music like that and does the things that I do is not going to be exactly the most even-keel person in the world. I have been prone to a great deal of very bad depression. I've suffered from a history of depression which I hope that as I get older, I come more and more to terms with."

"It's like an adolescent depression that you get when you're about 15, and it never quite leaves you. It's always there and it's also been the source of my creativity as well to a great degree; at least in the sense that I sense this awful sort of angst and greyness about existence. Part of the reason why I've ever written songs was to deal with that, to express what was inside, which was just something so awful."

Interjects Stewart, "Annie once came to me and said, 'I've written this song on my own and it's called 'Depression' and I'm going to play it!' I told her that it wasn't that I didn't think it was any good, it was just that I didn't fancy going round singing it."

So it must say something about the current state of Lennox's churning innards that the new album is a brash and sturdy upbeat pumper, optimistic. The grim truces are visible still—"Here Comes That Sinking Feeling" asks, "Have you ever heard the sound of disappointment? It pounds in your head like hammer blows? . . . and it likes to leave a scar"—but they're fiercely outnumbered by the assertive "Would I Lie To You?", "Conditioned Soul", "There Must Be an Angel", and the Aretha Franklin duet "Sisters Are Doing It" for Themselves, on the surface apparently a feminist call to arms.

"I suppose that song's feminist in the sense that it's women singing about women," shrugs Lennox, "but it's really just a song for people in a situation like mine, people who now do things through their own assertion, through their own power, that they would never have been able to do before."

Stewart opines that if "Sisters" is released as a single, "it will almost be a special event. It's a statement that's never been made in a commercial pop song before." He hopes it will go some of the way to restoring the equilibrium upset by all those heavy-metal groups with their anthemlike "I'm a man! And I'm gonna rock you, honey!"

"You really have to hope for that potential," says Lennox. "Like there are millions of women and we're all in the same boat. When you go to a women's sauna, everyone's there with their clothes off and it's all evened out. You see fat women and they look great because they're not all bulged into their clothes; you see the ones with bad scars from lots of childbearing; But when the clothes go back on you get all those barriers again—and I mean women versus women. There's still too much competition."

As a whole, *Be Yourself Tonight* is the logical musical progression of a partnership that has strengthened and advanced.

What began as a bluff of tough lyrical stance and taut synth-pop derivations in their early Tourists days (most of it written neither by Lennon nor Stewart) stretched into the lightness and more considered and slightly post-psychedelic feel of Eurythmics, and was further upgraded by Lennox's Tama-style vocal conviction from Sweet Dreams onward. (Lennox had spent most weekends as a young girl in Aberdeen dancing to Motown, but she swears she didn't know what that was until Stewart told her at the start of the Sweet Dreams sessions.) Stewart's production work—recently extended to the Ramones and



Photo: Michael Putland

*"I sense this awful sort of angst and greyness about existence. Part of the reason why I've ever written songs was to deal with that."*

Tonight— and Lennox's classical music leanings further broaden their sound. (In the early '70s, Lennox passed three years flute tuning at London's Royal Academy of Music, where she felt distinctly unfulfilled: "All the boys were gay and all the girls thought they were Maria Callas.")

Their newfound strength crosses over to their business dealings, and like most bands at this stage in their career, it's strength through experience: a protracted legal battle with Logo Records, their first company, and later problems with their own management left them scarred, out of pocket, and decidedly wiser. "We'd never have those problems now," vows Stewart, who once thought of placing an ad in the music papers, naming the management firm and declaring: "Young bands! Don't sign!"

"Ours was a management company that I think is quite famous for getting a band that's already signed to a label, then moving them to another label for a massive advance by persuading this new label that they're just the biggest thing. They then take their cut and they're not interested in you anymore."

"I would go in there and say: 'What's the plan? There must be some sort of plan if you're a group'; we didn't know anything about it. So the products they gave us was a band, a manager, and Tom Allom. The last album he produced was for Judas Priest and in the tour we were trying to sound like the Byrds, so this guy didn't understand us at all."

He feels the problem's unchanging. "People who really love playing and writing songs aren't usually interested in business. Really, it's like they play tiddlywinks with you. I suppose I could completely take a young band to the cleaners, just on what I know. So these guys who study law . . ."

"We cover ourselves as much as we can," adds Lennox, "but you still don't really know. We never thought that we'd lose as badly as we did on the 1984 thing. Like never ever thought that the guy who asked us to write the music had somebody else that he wanted to have the music from really and he just let us do it because he wanted to keep Virgin [the film's backers] satisfied."

The battle over 1984 rages still, and Eurythmics feel they've yet to put their full case. Start here: Bowie? Didn't do the sound track because he reckons the fees sucks; Dominic Muldowney is commissioned and produces a collection of Oceanian mood music; Eurythmics are then also asked to write a sound track and they hole themselves away in the Bahamas to produce the Annie Dream Concept—strange tunes of depression, oppression, love, and loathing.

That's all the facts you get. Opinions start with the theory that because the film was soaring endlessly over budget, something had to be found as a focal point around which all the monster-sized film egos could scratch their frazzled claws. That was the sound track. Virgin boss Richard Branson was horrified by the spiraling costs; Lennox and Stewart now claim that they were called in to keep Branson happy because a) with the music supplied by a chart act he'd have a better chance of selling 1984 abroad, particularly in the United States where he'd so far had trouble getting investors, and b) that he'd have a hit album from the band on his own label, offsetting the budget deficit a little.

Which Stewart and Lennox would have considered fair enough, if the music had at least been used when the film received its UK premiere last October. "The only way we found out it wasn't on," says Stewart, "was when our office wasn't sent any invitations to the screening. But we still didn't tell them that Michael Radford [director], Simon Pepe [producer], and Richard Burton were going among themselves."

"We spoke to Perry every day, or every second day," adds Lennox, "and there wasn't one inference that they didn't like what we were doing."

Their 1984 album is quite distinct from their sound track, and is one of the duo's finest experiments. Much of it is an adventure in electronic soundscapes reminiscent of Bowie's *Low*. But they don't want to talk about the album. They want to talk about producer

Simon Perry—"I think what he underestimated was that he saw Annie and I as a sort of poppy thing that was nothing to do with serious work. What he'll regret in later years is that if we wanted to, we could go round the world telling people never to use Simon Perry."

In one sense Eurythmics got the final laugh. Virgin exercised its right of final cut and cut in Eurythmics and cut out a cut of the Muldowney score on the rough film he was working from and he "actually thought it was taken from *Pathe News*" and that "it was on as a joke." (He refers to Dominic Muldowney as "Michael" while earlier Lennox had called him "Jonathan"—a team joke, maybe?)

"We just wish that we didn't have anything to do with it," Lennox regrets now, "because we didn't need that. We were asked to do the music for *The Company of Wolves* and other things. 1984 just seemed like the perfect project at the time."

**A**nnie's marriage to German Hare Krishna devotee Radha Raman 16 months ago had earlier caused almost as much of a hullabaloo. It got eight out of ten on the hoo-ha gauge even though the identity of her husband was revealed only some days after the news that she was married at all, presumably to soften the media blow-out. The real shocker was that they'd known each other but three weeks.

"My reaction was half shock," says Stewart, "and half that I was kind of pleased to think that she'd met somebody who would put everything on an even keel. Before that, Annie's graph was like this . . ." (makes violent up-and-down movement with a fork dripping

baked-bean sauce).

So how's it all going now? "Ah . . . ah . . . not too well right now," whispers Lennox. Understatement of the year, that one. News of their proceeding divorce filtered through two days later. "It's a little tricky for me to discuss it because it's a very personal issue. I would say that I'm very good friends with him, and I just hope that we'll continue to be. But sometimes people just develop at different rates, and that's what happened with us—I think we've just gone in slightly different directions."

Had her views regarding Krishna changed during the last year? "At the beginning I didn't really know anything about the movement—most people don't, and it's just a strange, fascinating cult. I didn't see them as religious nuts, because I've read enough about spirituality to know that there's more to it than that. But I didn't marry a Hare Krishna, I married a person. That's the thing that really distresses me about the media and how it always has to stress something. I mean, if I'd married a Roman Catholic . . . I know of course that visually it looks different, but on the other hand, so what? In the media they had me going all weird and funny, and I'm just the same as I ever was."

Lennox smiles, perhaps slightly alarmed at her own candor. "Well, I have to be honest really—there's no point in hiding anything." But she detests misquotes and misleading headlines, she stresses, recalling such wonders as the Scottish *Daily Record's* "Kookie Annie, the Mad Queen of Pop."

"The best one was Annie on the front page of the *National Enquirer*," says Stewart. "The headline was 'Annie's Bizarre Sex Life,' and in fact it was about An-

nie's marriage to Radha and about how nice and peaceful it was. It was absolutely not about sex."

"I think it was actually about how I wasn't getting any," offers Lennox.

**T**he all-round philosophical optimism is beginning to get depressing. "Strife and learning go hand-in-hand," chirps Stewart. "You've just got to turn those chaotic things to your advantage," echoes Annie.

She jokes that her upcoming cameo role in *Revolution*, Hugh Hudson's vision of the War of Independence that stars Al Pacino and Nastassja Kinski, may yet hold further controversy. She plays Liberty, "a kind of symbolic character," she winks. "I'm so excited—I just saw some photographs of the wharf-side at King's Lynn Jan East England coastal resort, which they've turned into an eighteenth-century New York. The streets are thick with mud; it's quite extraordinary!"

It's the first film offer she's accepted. "I've had different sorts of things offered all the time. But they always seem to be silly rock singers getting screwed up. And I certainly don't want to do those."

*"I can see things more clearly now.  
And I'm not afraid as I was; I  
was very anxiety-ridden."*



# The Glamorous Life Of Al Yankovic

Al bought a jacket for this interview. It cost \$10.

Article by Harold Conrad

**T**he first time Al Yankovic hears Dr. Demento, it's like Bela Lugosi reading Boris Karloff. The doctor has been practicing weirdness for many years as the host of a bizarre 160-station syndicated radio show, and if there's a ridiculous, an obscene, an off-beat recording somewhere, it's in the doctor's files. Demento has the formula for weirdness, but Yankovic, who has already dubbed himself "Weird Al" since his dorm days at Cal. Poly Tech, thinks he has some himself.

So, using third-rate equipment and the cheapest cassettes he can find, Al keeps taping his original material and submitting it to the Doctor. One note is played for a couple years. Al calls and requests his own stuff, but it's no go. So Al keeps going back to his "studio"—a men's room at Cal Poly, where he is an architecture student, because the tiled toilet has the echo he needs for his experiments.

Finally, Al receives a note from Demento. "I think you have potential," it says, "but only 39-cent people use 39-cent cassettes." Al goes back to the lavatory to mix more metaphors. He cuts down on lunch, buys better cassettes, and juggles his syntax for another year. Then—Eureka!—he finds the missing ingredient. He records a wicked parody of *The Knack's* "My Sharona," which he calls, "My Bologna." Not only does Dr. Demento play it and play it, but other disc jockeys around the country tape it and play it and play it. Al records the number for Capitol Records, but by the time it's released, it's played out.

But Al's on a roll. The following year he writes "Another One Bites the Dust" and finally the two weird ones meet professionally. Al performs the song on Demento's show and it becomes the most requested number on the Doctor's showcase in its ten-year history. A year later they're doing one-nighters as a team whenever D can get away from his radio network. So Al's not a 39-cent comic anymore.

A few months ago I spent a quiet afternoon with a couple of Yankovics. If you play straight for "Weird Al" Yankovic, he'll put you on and can be as weird as you want to be. If you get serious, you find yourself dealing with Alfred Matthew Yankovic, his alter ego, a rational, lucid young man who thoughts well on his way to his first million, can recall with anguish that only a few years ago he was down to his last five bucks.

Weird Al's craziness has won him a Grammy for the best comedy album, the Cashbox pop album award over Eddie Murphy, Richard Pryor, and Rodney Dangerfield, plus a cache of other trophies as he stays high on the charts in the U.S., Canada, England, Japan, and Australia.

Yankovic had quickly planted himself in the American pop consciousness right after his success on the Dr. Demento show. He followed his satire of "My Sharona" with a parody of "Mickey" called "Ricky," a riff on the I Love Lucy show, and "I Love Rocky Road," a takeoff on Joan Jetts "I Love Rock and Roll." Then came "Eat It," the parody of Michael Jackson's "Beat It," which took all the marbles.

While I'm sitting in my pad on the edge of Beverly Hills waiting for Al to show up, I run off the video cassette of two songs from *In 3-D*, the mother lode of his goods up until now, a fresh, clever collection of satirical put-ons that has kids all over the world doing parodies on everything from their teacher to their dog. On the tape Al is hopping around like an agitated flamingo, arms flapping, long legs flying as he converts Michael Jackson's "Beat It" into hilarious satire. I try to get a bead on what really looks like, but his rubber-faced grimaces make that impossible.

A few minutes later Yankovic shows up. He's a smooth-shaven, gangling guy with a friendly face and serenity in hisasic features. If I don't know better, I would peg him as a scoundrel picking up the kids for the Sunday hike, except for one thing—the Hawaiian shirt he is wearing. It would have turned Tom Selleck's stomach. It's a minute, yellow-green. These editorial assaults, I find out, are part of Al's wardrobe.

"Al, you keep popping up on every video show on the tube, the money is rolling in, and you're up to your ass in awards," I say, and read off a list of his trophies. I see his eyebrows go up. "Did I leave something out?" I ask.

"Yes," he says, "the American Video award. I won for best male performance for 'Eat It' and I beat out Springsteen, Don Henley, and George Michael." He gives a nervous little laugh as though he is overstepping the bounds of modesty. "But it was a surprise to everybody, most of all, me."

"How does it feel now that you're a star, with all that dough in the bank? Don't you have the urge to go out and buy all the things you couldn't afford before?"

"I don't want to go real crazy," he says. "I just want to have enough money in the bank not to worry about anything, and if I don't have to go back to my first job, working in a mail room, I'll be happy as long as I live. What I'm doing now has always been a hobby of mine and to make a living out of it is incredible. I'm doing things that I never dreamed I'd be doing and it's nice to know that if I manage my money right, I won't ever have to get a real job again."

"Are you still around about having to top yourself? Eat It's a big one to follow."

"It's a little too early to tell. You know, my new album, *Dare to Be Stupid*, just came out and we're doing three cuts for video. The one with the most potential is called 'Like a Surgeon.'"

"What does Madonna think about it?"

"It was her idea. I didn't even know Madonna. She suggested it to a friend of mine. The title here, too."

"Have you had a problem getting big stars to let you fiddle with their lyrics?"

"We've had some turn-downs, but since Michael gave us permission to do 'Eat It' I think it's made things easier."

Al's latent talents surfaced on this one, which turned out to be a double-edged parody. Not only did he satirize "Beat It" but he brilliantly parodied the nimble one's dance moves in the video.

"Where did you learn to dance?" I ask him.

"I can't dance," he says. "I never even danced at the school proms. But we thought it would be funnier for a guy who couldn't dance to imitate a great dancer like Michael."

"How did you hit on 'Eat It'?"

"My manager, Jay, my producer, Robert K. Weiss (*The Blues Brothers*, *Kentucky Fried Movie*), and I were sitting around Jerry's living room and we just kept saying, 'Wouldn't it be funny if . . .' Before we knew it we had the whole thing written."

"For the video we recreated the sets and choreography in a warehouse, and we were fortunate to have excellent set and costume people. We had a videotape and monitor on stage and we'd freeze a scene from 'Beat It' and the set people would duplicate it."

Not every parody Yankovic has wanted to do has panned out. "What do we send the star a verse or two of the song to see if they have a sense of humor. If not, we drop the project." Among the thin-skinned ones who have declined the honor is ex-Beatle George Harrison.

"What did Michael think of your interpretation?"

"He must have liked the idea or he wouldn't have given us permission. I didn't know Michael. We applied to his organization. He's got a long chain of command, but Michael has the last word and it finally had to come to him. I was delighted to find that he had a sense of humor."

"What's the signal that a song has parody potential?"

"Al rubs his ample chin and makes a face. "Every once in a while there's a song with a monster hook," he says, "at least for me, and if I feel the beat is right, that's the signal."

For instance? I ask. "How did you come up with a Cuban bandleader and his scatter-brained wife out of Tony Basil's 'Mickey'?"

Punctuating his answer with a few chuckles, he says, "When I was a kid I always wanted to grow up to be a Cuban bandleader," and from the look in his eye I know we're back in Weirdest Valley.

"Want to try for another motive?" I ask.

There's a long pause. His face is dead-pant and now he's Alfred Matthew Yankovic. "When I first heard 'Mickey' I thought it was a definite contender and as I saw it zooming up the charts, I thought of all the things I could do. Then it clicked. I've been an I Love Lucy fan since I was a kid and it seems like I've been watching the reruns all of my life. I saw Ricky and Lucy Ricardo doing all their crazy things to the beat of 'Mickey'."

The weird one quit his job in the mail room the week "Ricky" hit the Billboard charts with its throbbing beat.

So now a lot of ears are tuned to see if Al can keep up this mad pace. Satire and parody are tricky literary genres and the form is older than the written word. When it's not good, it's awful, but when it's on the mark, it crackles and not many performers have mastered it.

Al holds a degree in architecture from California Polytechnic University, where he first hung the "Weird Al" title on himself while doing a campus radio show, but he had been dabbling in satire and parody for five years before he got into high school. His inspirations in the '50s were genuine parodists such as Spike Jones, Tom Lehrer, and the late Allan Sherman. He was also a big fan of *Mad* magazine, hit movies and popular TV shows. By the time he was 12 he began to see humor in the foibles of American lifestyles and then Dr. Demento came into his life.



Through Demento Al not only got exposure, but a manager, too—Jay Levey. And through Levey he got the Breaks, the first a contract with Rock and Roll Records. Despite the success of his early singles, record companies weren't beating a path to sign Al up. The geniuses felt that he was a flash in the pan who couldn't maintain the pace, a one-joke guy. But Tad Dowd, the president of Rock and Roll Records, saw him differently.

"A fellow named Jake Hooker, who is not only a successful talent manager, but wrote 'I Love Rock 'n' Roll,' got a call from Jay Levey, asking permission to do a parody of the song which they called 'I Love Rocky Road.'

"Hooker was so impressed with Yankovic," said Dowd, "that he brought him to one of his clients, Rick Derringer, a legend in rock 'n' roll. Derringer is not only a helluva guitar player, but he's a great producer. They got together and recorded enough tracks for an album, and Hooker brought the package to me. I was excited about it because it's not often that you hear something really fresh in rock."

**O**n a Sunday morning I call Al and tell him I have a reservation at Matteo's, an L.A. restaurant. On Sunday night is the night at Matteo's for the weekly gathering of Hollywood types—stars, writers, producers. I want to see how Weird Al fares in the big leagues.

"We're a jacket, Al," I tell him. "Anything to cover up one of those shirts."

"I don't own a jacket," he says. "I don't own a suit."

When he picks me up that evening he is carrying something dark blue under his arm that he unfolds and holds up. "How about this," he says. "It's a jacket. I got it at a second-hand store for ten bucks." He puts it on and it doesn't look bad.

Now we go out to the car and I head for the shiny BMW sitting out front, but he steers me down the street to a '78 Toyota Corolla. We take off in a concert of strange little noises and when we go over 35 miles an hour it sounds like a group of Lilliputian bongo players playing a gig under the hood. Conversation is almost impossible.

Since he's been putting me on, I figure I ought to return the compliment. When we stop for a red light I say, "How does a big rock star like you ride around in a junk wagon like this, especially in Hollywood?"

"Because I'm cheap," he yells. The light changes, we take off, and the junk wagon plays again.

Matteo's Restaurant, on the edge of Westwood, is jumping. Sinatra is sitting in the back. There's Milton Berle, Sammy Davis, several movie producers. We first go to the crowded bar and I'm watching for a reaction. There are a few intellectual nods from some of the younger people and that's it, but this is no barometer. Asking for an autograph at Matteo's is considered gauche. Al is enjoying the scene. For him it's the other side of show business and I can see he doesn't feel like a star in this setting.

"I have to give Tad Dowd the credit for where I am," Al is saying after we sit down at a choice table. "He took a gamble on me when the others wouldn't."

Maybe it was the accordion, Al. As a kid, Al studied the accordion and got nowhere.

"I always wanted to be a rock musician," he says, then I see that weird look in his eye again as he says, "My parents chose the accordion because they were convinced it would revolutionize rock." It is of no minor coincidence that his parents are of Yugoslavian lineage and it so happens that Frankie Yankovic (no relation), known as the polka king and one of the best accordionsists in the country, also happens to be a Yugoslav. A little chauvinism here.

But Al is trying to paint a picture. "I got so bored playing overtures," he says, "that I started teaching myself rock songs and that's how it all began."

"When other kids my age were listening to Rod Stewart and the Eagles, I was listening to the Demento show



and he'd be playing all these great comedic artists from the past that don't get played. Every Sunday night I'd tune in and I just thought this was my kind of music, this is what I wanted to do. So I picked up my accordion, which had been mainly used to play polkas, overtures, and ballads, and started noodling around with it and came up with some pretty strange stuff. I started writing love songs about my car, about the food in the school cafeteria, doing some ridiculous tunes to amuse myself, my friends. I wrote one song about leisure suits, I wrote a song about a guy who never took showers."

"How about your first hit? I ask. "You're a rich rock star and you're a beat-looking guy when you aren't mugging. At the girls breaking down when you're?"

"One of songs on the new album is my first attempt at a 'love song.' The chorus is: 'I'd rather spend eternity eating shards of broken glass/Than spend one more minute with you!'

"A lot of my humor is a tribute to the mundane, those things that people don't pay any honor to. It's a tribute to Americana. There are four parodies on the new album. 'Like a Surgeon':

I finally made it through med school  
Somehow I made it through  
I'm just an intern, I still make  
A mistake or two  
  
I was last . . . in my class  
Barely passed . . . at the institute  
Now I'm tryin' to avoid  
Yeah, I'm tryin' to avoid  
A malpractice suit  
  
Hey, like a surgeon  
Cuttin' for the very first time  
Like a surgeon  
Organ transplants are fine.

Al laughs like a demented kid. "Another pretty silly idea," he says, "but it was fun. Then there's 'Girls Just Wanna Have Lunch.'

"Then there's a song I actually wrote in college. It took me five years to get permission. It's a parody of 'Lola' called 'Yoda,' the Star Wars character. We approached Ray Davies, we've been approaching him every year and a half, two years before each album comes out and he's always been a little skeptical, a little afraid because 'Lola' was a very personal song for him. Just out of the blue he decided this time to let us do it. Then we got George Lucas's permission. The last song is 'I Want a New Duck.'"

"What?"

"Quack, quack," he says. "It's a take on 'I Want a New Drug.'"

I want a new duck

One that won't try to bite

One that won't chew a hole in my socks

One that won't quack all night."

Quack, quack.

**O**n the drive back we stop off at one of Yankovic's haunts on La Cienega Boulevard. The clientele is several decades younger than the Serutan set at Matteo's. All eyes are on Al as he saunters to a table. The adorable little waitress lingers as she takes our order. Two cute girls stop by on their way out. "I just had to shake your hand, Al," one of them says coyly.

Al's eyebrows are moving up and down and his eyes are telling me, "See, I really am a star." He even picks up the check. On the drive home, I give him one more needful "Al." I say, "you can't keep riding around Hollywood in this jalopy. You're a star, for God's sake."

Just before we go to press, I call Al from New York to check out a few things. His answering machine is on but it doesn't answer with words, just laughs and titters. He calls me back that evening and now I hear the laughs and titters live.

"I thought I ought to tell you," he says. "I just bought a new Mazda."



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# SONIC YOUTH

Hear a rumbling  
from Manhattan's  
Lower East Side?  
That's Sonic Youth's  
squall of the wild.

Article by Byron Coley

**T**he street is filled with broken Malta bottles. The building's doorway is decorated with a cross drawn with what appears to be cat shit. Somewhere nearby a tire is burning. Three long flights of stairs above this, Thurston Moore, the master of all he surveys, lies sprawled across a daybed. Looking like a sallow and distended version of Jay "The Menace" North, Moore lolls his head over the edge of the mattress and touches the apartment wall with his feet. A few inches away from these monstrous appendages there's a poster calling for the swift release of Charles Manson.

Thurston plays guitar and sings with New York's Sonic Youth. Although he denies it, he is also Sonic Youth's leader. He shares the apartment with his wife, Kim Gordon, who is Sonic Youth's bass player. They have a dog named Tex, a cat named Squeaky, and one of the most brutally powerful bands in the free world.

Through four years of steady-if-merciful live performances and a half-dozen records released on European and American independent labels, Sonic Youth has

evolved into a unit capable of generating a larger, more noisome riff than anyone since the John Cage-era Velvets. In an interview two years ago, Thurston stated that his intention in starting Sonic Youth was to combine the bone-splitting intensity of Throbbing Gristle (Britain's seminal and monolithic un-punk squall masters) and the reckless energy of Black Flag (America's dukes of the hard-noise arena). If Sonic Youth has missed this target, it's only by inches.

Thurston's and Kim's string hammering, in concord with that of guitarist Lee Ranaldo, all laid over the cleaved-meat percussing of Bob Bert (recently replaced by former Crucifuck Steve Shelley), can whip up a din that sends neophytes scampering into corners whilst its devotees writh in the snake-oiled Discordian mojo. Alternately, the band's instrumental elements can roll themselves out like a deep-pile steel-wool carpet above which the vocals float and dart as if they were orgone pixies sprung from the mane of Wilhelm Reich. Their most recent recording, *Bad Moon Rising* (released in

this country by Long Island's petite Homestead Records), is handily available evidence of Sonic Youth's binary nature.

Recorded for something less than 4,000 borrowed dollars, *Bad Moon Rising* was named after the CCR hit ("John Fogerty is my life's blood," sayeth Moore) and offers an aural portrait of the band that is less singlemindedly violent than its immediate precursors. The ker-unch of guitars-as-battling-bulldozers is certainly the sound around which the record coils, but the strings' scraping roar keeps away from upper tonal registers. Consequently, the vocals assume a higher profile than they have in the past, and the vocalists treat their throats with more respect than they grant their instruments. The pacing of the songs is also a bit less jarring here than on previous efforts. In fact, one of the tunes, "I Love Her All the Time," has such a (comparatively) languid air that I'm tempted to describe it as pastoral. That description is relative, however, and the album's primary lyrical outlook is about as pleasant and simple as an ax blow to the face. And, as if to blot out any pos-



signed reading of the LP as a signpost pointing toward a cheery 'n' bright Sonic Death Valley '69," is a creepy-crawl through Spahn Ranch with guest howls by the Love Kittens of the Hate Generation—Lydia Lunch.

In a lot of ways it seems that Sonic Youth is hell-bent on defying listeners' attempts to prophesy its stylistic direction. By waving my right hand before his face, I catch Thurston's attention and ask him if this is the case.

"Well, actually, the direction of our material is more or less dictated by our instruments," he forthrightly replies. "After we got back from Europe the last time, we decided we were tired of doing the old set, so we took all the strings off the guitars, threw them around a little bit, put some new strings on them, and hammered them a little so that we had to write all new songs. The playing on the guitars once we got through with them was so different that we killed our old songs. 'When we wrote a new batch of songs, they turned out to be more subtle. They

were a little more laid back physically . . . more cerebral."

During its, uh, "less cerebral" phase, Sonic Youth was noted for having a live presentation so aggressive that the only fit comparison is to the most wildly auto-destructive moments of Iggy's last tour with the Stooges. Thurston and Lee would work themselves into a frenzy, attacking their guitars and Bob's drums with bottles, screwdrivers, microphone stands, or whatever else was handy, then hoisting their guitars by the strings and pilingriving them into the stage while the amp's erupted in feedback and precious bodily fluid flowed like cheap wine. But while this may've been real damn pleasing to the Romans amongst us, others were less happy with it (a notable member of this contingent was Kim, who was mighty tired of getting hit by flying wood and metal), and indeed, it doesn't seem like this sort of m.o. is the best way to assure longevity.

The height (or depth?) of Sonic Youth's most vicious period occurred during a tour of the South that Thurston personally had set up. Together with another Manhattan-based quartet, the Swans, Sonic Youth played to small crowds "who'd heard that we were 'a couple of hardcore punk bands from New York,'" Thurston says with a smile. "And if that was what they wanted . . . Well, we weren't going to go out there and play straight hardcore, but we did it in our own style. We got into a totally physical thing. We'd just be on stage beating the fuck out of ourselves. It was like—YEAH!"

Thurston remembers the band's last date on its second swing through Europe as the swan song of this open-up-and-bleed policy. "We had one gig set up in London," he recalls, a real touch of excitement entering his voice. "And we got there and we were just totally nutzoid at this point. We'd just finished a tour where every show was just me and Lee running through the audience climbing on people's shoulders and having Lee play his guitar on other people's teeth."

"Lee and I are born show-offs, and once we were there in front of people we'd never seen again who didn't know English, we just let loose. We felt like, 'Let's take a dump and smear it on their eyeballs!'"

"So we just had this one show in London, and at the last minute they really screwed us up about getting a soundcheck and when our starting time was going to be and everything else. We'd spent a ton of money renting incredible equipment for the show and had gotten in touch with all these press people, and it looked like we were gonna get completely reamed. So . . . we figured we'd go out and at least play a set, but once we went out there, weird things started to happen."

"Lee had turned his amp all the way up to 10 and was going crazy on it; then Kim's bass string broke on the first song, which never happens; Bob's cymbals wouldn't stand up; my guitar was cutting in and out—it was just horrible. We'd all looked at each other backstage when we first got there like—*This is it! This is fuckin' London!* And we were horrible, so we just freaked out.

"We started playing 'Kill Your Idols'



Leslie Frantz

*The Youth at yesterday's cabaret (l-r): Bobb Rotl, Lee Ranaldo, Kim Gordon, and Thurston Moore*

[Sonic Youth's ode to Village Voice critic Robert Christgau] really fast. I got out some of the other guitars and started using them to smash these bottles, and glass was flying into the audience. This bouncer tried to stop us, so I picked up a monitor and threw it at him. The audience was screaming and pounding the stage. Lee was wiggling out completely, and he blew up this Mesa Boogie amp that costs thousands of dollars—smoke started pouring out of it. Then the curtains started closing and we were trying to keep them open and smashing everything we could get our hands on, and it was just great."

Interestingly, Sonic Youth, although third-billed for the evening in question, received the lion's share of the good press for the gig when reviews started coming out in the English press. But Thurston reckoned that this was "mostly because the other bands were so lame," and enough was—at least for the moment—enough. The more sedate material that comprised *Ball Moon Rising* was completely shelved thereafter.

Even with this more accessible set, though, it's unlikely that Sonic Youth will achieve enormous popularity in the States. They may already be a major attraction in some European cities, such as Berlin (where they're "treated like the Monkees," according to Thurston), but their sound has too much barbed wire in it for digestion by America's all-important radio stations. Similarly, their chances for placing a video on MTV seem nil, and they've even collected some powerful detractors in the media. Foremost among these is Christgau, with whom Thurston waged a personal letter-battle regarding the Voice's treatment of New York bands in general and Sonic Youth in particular.

When asked if he's afraid this means that he'll never get a chance to teach the world to sing, Moon looks thoughtful for a moment.

"Maybe, but I always felt more like teaching the world to sing, anyway," he replies.

"On the corner lies a tire. Smoldering.

# THE FIRE THIS TIME

The Sound and the Fury  
of Reggae's Premier Poet:  
Linton Kwesi Johnson

Article by Roger Steffens

Photography by Andrew Catlin



Linton Kwesi Johnson slowly unbuttons his white shirt, takes off the straw hat covering his short nappy hair, and collapses into a chair in the dressing room at the Beverly Theatre in Los Angeles. Even when relaxed, there is something inside him that remains agitated, nervous, always on the prowl. While a tape of his latest dub (instrumental) poetry album plays on a small portable stereo nearby, Johnson closes his eyes, concentrating intensely as he tries to explain why he is fed up with the music business.

"I'm really tired of the business," he says. "The whole structure of the business, how it runs, turns me off."

The extravagant reception he had just received onstage doesn't seem to have shaken this feeling.

"That's it," he says, his voice edgy and restless. "You've just seen my last performance in the States. I won't play here again. I've had it. I didn't set out to become a recording artist and professional reggae entertainer. That's what I wanted to do. I found myself being swept along. But I want to get out now."

Outside the dressing room, Dennis "Blackboard" Bovell, Johnson's longtime collaborator, multi-instrumentalist, and producer, is packing up his instruments.

"Nonsense," he says when I tell him what Johnson's said about retiring. "Linton's always saying that when he gets tired of being on the road."

I poke my head back into Johnson's dressing room to tell him that Bovell says he's just road-weary and after a rest he'll come back again stronger than ever, and for a moment Linton keeps on gathering up his papers and packing them away as if he didn't hear me. He zips his clothing bag and sits down again.

"No, man, I'm serious. I've taken dub poetry as far as it can go. Other voices have emerged and are developing it."

For the past 10 years, Johnson has been the father of dub poetry. Among the voices that have emerged are

the iconoclastic Mutabaruka, ex-prisoner Oku Onu, dub-ranter Benjamin Zephaniah, and the late Michael Smith. This pantheon of rebels has been at the center of political storms in Jamaica. Smith in particular has come to symbolize the dub poets' power and politicians' fear of their potential for arousing rebellion. Two years ago, two hours after a political confrontation with Jamaica's minister of education, Smith was stoned to death in Kingston by a political gang.

Does the government's reaction to these political poets prove that the pen is mightier than the sword?

"Certainly," says Johnson, grinning, then he adds, "not." A broad smile creases his fine-boned features, and he lets out a warm, rolling wave of laughter. "It's not, no. There are times when it can be, but in general it's not. Governments have always had trouble with poets and locked us up. Poets represent the truth. And governments are afraid of the truth. The truth is always a weapon. But mightier than the sword? No."

Anyone familiar with the work and accomplishments of this mild-mannered and self-effacing young man of 33 would scoff at those words. LKJ's poems have spear-headed battles that have helped win the release from prison of several unjustly sentenced people. He is Gil Scott-Heron with a reggae beat. Malcolm X with a band. He has brought his message to tiny community get-togethers and halls of 10,000. His words leave no doubt as to where he stands. On the title track of his 1984 album, *Making History*, he laments gleefully: "It was de even of de year/any I wish I had been dere/when we run riot all over Brixton/and dem mash up plenty police van/...mek de ruler unstan/that we nah take nuh more of dem oppression."

Darcus Howe, Johnson's co-worker on London's revolutionary vanguard magazine, *Race Today*, and one of those sprung from prison through LKJ's efforts, credits him with uniting many different factions of blacks in



*"Governments have always had trouble with poets and locked us up, because poets represent the truth."*

England. Internationally, Johnson's unique blend of politics, poetry, and powerhouse reggae riddims has brought him fame. "Reggae has always been the only vehicle in the modern era through which people could express themselves politically, independent of the political party process. In Jamaica, people would express political protest in folk songs they made up. When the recording industry started, that whole tradition continued. At times, political party leaders will try to exploit that, as they did with Delroy Wilson's 'Better Must Come,' which was co-opted as a political party slogan. Also, from time to time certain reggae artists have lent their services to politicians. They all used to do it, not just Marley. A whole set of them. That's how it is; that's how it's always been."

The radicalization of Linton Kwesi Johnson began when he left Jamaica at the age of 10. "The day-to-day experiences from the very time I reached England in 1963 radicalized me. I was going to school and living in society and experiencing racism. I saw what was happening on the streets. I heard grownups talking about the situation. I got involved in the Black Panther Movement. First I joined the Youth League, and I discovered black literature. W.E.B. DuBois' *Soul of Black Folk* was the catalyst. After I read that book I wanted to write."

Eventually, Johnson received an honors degree in sociology from the University of London. "The degree is worthless, the experience wasn't, because what I got out of that was the discipline of being able to go to a book of knowledge and make sense of it. But sociology is so much alibitidge. I unlearned it as soon as it left; it's so airy-fairy."

Johnson's first book of poetry, *Voices of the Living and the Dead*, was published in 1974. His second, *Dread Beat and Blood*, appeared the following year, and a third, *Inglass is a Bitch*, in 1980. During the mid-'70s, his studies, writing, and activism began to be combined with music. "I used to write and recite my poetry on my own. Then I got together with some Rasta drummers, called Rasta Love, and we would go around doing poetry with percussion instruments. And from time to time there might be a bass guitar or a saxophone player. At one time I was doing copywriting for Virgin Records—ads for them, biographies of the artists, sleeve notes, and that kind of thing—and I had the opportunity to make a record. And that's how the whole thing began. 'Dread Beat and Blood' was one of the first poems I wrote when I began to try and write in the Jamaican vernacular and was beginning to hear a reggae bass line when I was writing. That marks the start of my reggae poetry period."

I first met Johnson a couple years ago in London. He was surprisingly slight physically, compared with the powerful presence his deep, expressivistic voice projects on his recordings. In person, he's a black Clark Kent. We spoke at length about how he wed the spoken word to skin-tight instrumental backings. He admitted that he had used all the tools on the album.

"I mean, I don't write music, but I been with bass line. You know the bass line in reggae gives you the melody. It is not simply a rhythm instrument; it's a melodic instrument. So when I'm writing my poems I always have a bass line going in the back of my head. It's simply a matter of bringing out the line itself and working it. I communicate the bass to the rest of the musicians. Then I do the drum. And then I decide what



kind of beat I want—a one-drop or a steppers or what—and I am listening in my head. I hear what the organ is doing and what the piano is doing and then later on I decide whether or not I'm gonna have some brass. I might have a guitar solo here or not. Then, during the actual process of recording, the musicians make their own suggestions."

The result is a quartet of albums that have gotten progressively more accomplished and sophisticated through the eighties. So why, now that he has found in the Dub and the perfect partners, is Johnson giving it all up? "I think it's time to move on to other things. I don't say I won't make any more records, but we're doing some shows in Germany, and then we're going to be doing some shows in Scandinavia. That is going to be the end of my touring. We might do a one-off thing, or go somewhere we've never been before. It's always a challenge to try to win over a new audience. Apart from that, I don't think I'll be touring and all that again. Tired of that. Last night you saw one of Linton Kwesi Johnson's last performances in America."

The machine of Johnson's political mind never stops. Our conversation is taking place on the Sunday *Presidential* Reagan is visiting a Nazi cemetery in Bitburg, Germany. "It's really ironic to think that while they're marking the 40th anniversary of the defeat of fascism in Europe, those very countries, America included, are promoting fascism somewhere else in the world. Namely, in South Africa. And in Latin America, too."

"Britain, the political parties, like the Conservative, cater to extreme right-wing fascist groups, people who support the National Front or the British Movement. Fascism is alive and thriving throughout the so-called civilized world. It's on the rise in France. For example, in 1984, at least 52 Arab youths, North Africans, were murdered by racists and fascists in France. I think the murderers' conviction rate is less than 20 percent. So it's there in France, it's there in Africa. As C.L.R. James, the Marxist historian, puts it: There's two ways we're heading right now. We're either heading for socialism or we're heading for barbarism. That's the only choice."

To advance his revolutionary ideals, Johnson publishes *Race Today*: "We're a weapon to inform people about what is taking place and to mobilize forces, nationally and internationally, around struggles we're involved in. There have been positive changes in Britain.

We have been able to build and sustain an independent black political movement. We've been able to build and sustain lasting cultural institutions. We have a vibrant black theater movement in Britain now. British reggae music has come into its own. In every single area of social life, we have made advances. But since the riots of '81, the government has nurtured the development of a black middle class that could act as a buffer between them and the rest of the blacks."

Two years ago Johnson wrote one of his most controversial poems/songs, "Di Black Petty Booswahl," which attacks this class with excoriating tone and deadly language. "Some of them are educated, some are semiliterate blacks with middle-class aspirations, and their contempt for white working-class people only betrays a greater contempt for blacks. They don't believe that ordinary working-class blacks can do anything for themselves, and therefore they see their future as being able to get a piece of the action for themselves."

Though Johnson advocates political action, he is no pacifist. "Definitely not." And he envisions armed revolutions in Britain and in his home island, though he won't predict when. "Who can say? When the people themselves decide to take up arms and fight. There's no formula for these things. They happened. Armed struggles have been taking place in Jamaica since the '70s, but it's been intermittently sponsored by the political parties. Will armed struggle happen in Jamaica? I think it's inevitable. Those economies in the islands can't sustain themselves. They're just tiny little islands in the Caribbean Sea with nothing going for themselves. They have to keep looking somewhere to borrow money. You can't keep borrowing and not pay back. They have to pay back enormous interest. Where are they going to get the money? They keep putting more and more pressure on the people. Sometimes the people demonstrate, sometimes they riot. I can't see that situation getting any better, so it's inevitable that it will get worse."

I ask if he sees any irony in the fact that Chris Blackwell, a millionaire Jamaican playboy whose grandfather reportedly kept slaves, is responsible for releasing the bulk of his recordings. He frowns thoughtfully, and finally says, "Well, yes, I suppose. But then, some of these big capitalist presses publish books on Marxism and Leninism and that. It's the culture in which we live that art is only available in the commodity form and is sold in the market like cigarettes. Anyway, I've come to the end of my agreement with Island Records, and I don't foresee myself going on another recording spree, making albums and touring and all that kind of thing. And if I do, then I think I'd rather work on my own this time. I had some good times with Island, but I had some bad times. I'm glad that the whole thing is finished now. In fact," he sighs, "I'm relieved."

So what's next for Johnson? "I'll release a live album on my LKJ label, recorded at Queen Elizabeth Hall." Johnson grins at this new irony, then adds, "And I think it's time for some instrumental sessions I did back in 1980 with Vivian Weathers and Dennis Bovell and some others. They were ahead of their time then. I think now the time is right. I'll also put out Dennis and the Dub Band's recordings and whatever is interesting in London."

The particulars of Johnson's activism may change, but his sense of purpose and determination remain focused on the timeless Rasta ideals of equal rights and justice. Linton Kwesi Johnson retired? Nonsense. •

# moving images

Egypt and Cisco review some bad videos (and great MTV commercials), including Eurythmics, Bryan Adams, Billy Idol, and Civil War chess sets.

## EGBERT & CISCO AT THE VIDEOS



Mark Westberg

CISCO: Hi, I'm Gene Cisco, rock video critic of the Middletown Daily Mirror. EGBERT: I thought it was the *Middletown Tribune*?

CISCO: It was bought out by the Tribune Company.

EGBERT: The one that owns the Chicago Cubs?

CISCO: Yeah.

EGBERT: Oh, and I'm Roger Egbert of the *Middletown Star-Ledger*.

CISCO: This month at the videos we would rather be watching a baseball game, but instead we'll be reviewing videos by John Fogerty, Keel, Eurythmics, Madness, Phil Collins, Billy Idol, and more.

EGBERT: But first we have . . . who is this?

CISCO: Well, he sounds just like Rod Stewart, but he looks like one of the new breed of actors who star in high-school sex comedies.

EGBERT: Oh, it's Bryan Adams in "Cuts Like a Knife." He and his band are rehearsing at the bottom of an Olympic-size swimming pool.

CISCO: And there is a girl behind some swinging doors taking off her clothes. Did you mention that the swimming pool has no water in it?



Paul Nolin

EGBERT: No, and that is important. Ooop, now she's taken her blouse off. CISCO: I'm speechless.

EGBERT: Either she's going to dive into an empty swimming pool or they are going to suddenly flood the pool, possibly electrocuting the band.

CISCO: God! I hope it's the latter. EGBERT: Nice back, huh? Not an ounce of cellulite on this girl.

CISCO: I can't believe how much they're showing on this video.

EGBERT: This singer has pretty bad acne scars to be so self-absorbed, wouldn't you say?

CISCO: Maybe they're symbolic of a troubled puberty.

EGBERT: Maybe we should lay off this guy's skin. I think we mentioned his complexion in his last video.

CISCO: We might mention that the girl has a flawless complexion.

EGBERT: The diving girl has a heart on a chain designed by Maripol, Madonna's jewelry designer. Oh my God! She's climbing up the ladder to the high board! She's going to take a high dive into the band.

CISCO: There she goes . . . !

EGBERT: Diving into the empty swimming pool during the guitar solo. The heart has fallen off the chain. Ooop! She's alive!

CISCO: She's all wet! What would you give that dive?

EGBERT: They didn't actually show the dive, but I'd give the girl a 9.7.

CISCO: What would you give Bryan Adams?

EGBERT: Adams suffers from a common problem of people who wear black leather motorcycle jackets: his T-shirt sticks out between his jeans and jacket.

CISCO: I guess the answer is to keep a stylist with you at all times.

Next we have . . .

EGBERT: I can't believe how many ads they have on MTV now.

CISCO: Yeah, they really upstage the videos.

Bryan Adams

EGBERT: But I'd really like to know: What do you think of the Civil War Chess Set? CISCO: I can't imagine who would buy one.

EGBERT: There are a lot of Civil War nuts out there. I have a friend named Henry in the garment business who has visited every Civil War battlefield.

CISCO: What's there?

EGBERT: Nothing.

CISCO: If he orders now, he'll get one piece a month for \$17.50 a pop. What else could you get for \$17.50 a month?

EGBERT: A phone, if you didn't make any outgoing calls. You could get a whole regular chess set every month. Otherwise, there's who buys it: Chess enthusiasts, Civil War buff, or proud American. "One interesting thing here is that the South, corresponds to white, which always goes first. So every time you play chess on the Civil War Chess Set, the South starts the war. That's probably pretty much the way it was."

CISCO: Do you think they'll ever have a Vietnam War Chess Set?

EGBERT: That would be something. I wonder if General Westmoreland would be the king? Or maybe Marshall Ky. Ho Chi Minh would definitely be the northern king.

CISCO: Who would be queen?

EGBERT: Well, maybe Madame Nhu would be the southern queen. I don't know about the North. Maybe Jane Fonda.

CISCO: Next we have Keel in "The Right to Rock."

EGBERT: This starts off with an ominous-looking character sitting in a limo—he could be Bebe Rebozo or Robert Abplanalp. Then there's some titles: "America—1989. Rock has been driven underground. The authorities stalk pirate broadcasters and their followers. Those who are apprehended suffer severe consequences." Okay, now we see your typical suburban-shopping-mall heavy-metal teenager who may dabble in satanism after school.

CISCO: He's wearing a leather vest and studded gloves.

EGBERT: And he's carrying a . . . is it a gun? A blaster when a suburban white kid is carrying it?

CISCO: It's a subblastar. Which just got smashed by a plainclothes cop.

EGBERT: He looks an awful lot like Dr. John.

CISCO: The kid is being arrested and thrown into a futuristic black maria that looks remarkably like the A Team van.

EGBERT: And we cut to what must be Keel playing in an undisclosed underground location. They're your basic Motley Crue look.

CISCO: Meanwhile, your basic heavy-metal juvenile perpetrator has set off a bomb in the van and escaped. He must be late for the secret concert.

EGBERT: Which is intercut with the kid running from G-men in black.

CISCO: He's getting away, thanks to the timely intervention of your basic outlaw motorcycle gang.

EGBERT: The singer, who has facial bones reminiscent of Elvis during his amphetamine days, is wearing what looks like a batting glove, although I suppose it could be a golfing glove.

CISCO: It must be a singing glove.

EGBERT: The kid has made a getaway. Now he's in his suburban bedrock, pretending his guitar's in keel.

CISCO: But the cops break down his bedroom door.

EGBERT: His concerned parents are right behind the cops, waiting, perhaps, to sign the detox papers.

CISCO: But a timely outlaw biker is right

Phil Collins



outside the kid's window, and the kid does a backflip out of the second-story window onto the back of the chopper, and they speed off into the night.

EGBERT: The cops manage to find the hidden concert, but they seem disabled by the heavy-metal music. They're getting electric shocks. Gee, do you think someday kids will have to fight for the right to rock?

CISCO: Next we have "Sussudio" by Phil Collins.

EGBERT: This is another intimate concert video. Phil's band is impersonating a pub band. Phil announces that this is their last song. This must be the break song.

CISCO: Break song?

EGBERT: Yeah, like Duke Ellington's "We want a 15-minute intermission, boss . . . We want a 15-minute intermission."

CISCO: Phil Collins sure is a strange-looking guy for a rock star.

# SADE

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EGBERT: You mean he's a pretty normal-looking guy for a rock star.

CISCO: Looking at him I would never guess he made rock and roll records.

EGBERT: Well, he sort of snuck through the back door. He started out as a drummer. They're partially hidden. Do you think he looks like a catcher?

CISCO: He looks like Pete Rose. More a player-manager type.

EGBERT: He bears a slight resemblance to Doug Rader, who was fired this season as manager of the Texas Rangers. But I think Phil has something of a catcher quality to him. Maybe your Sal Bando, Ron Hassey-type journeyman catcher.

CISCO: I bet he doesn't use drugs.

EGBERT: Maybe that's why he's playing in a pub. He has sweat on his upper lip where many other singers have a mustache. He's still making those stage moves, but they look a lot better because he's wearing very loose clothing.

CISCO: I really don't dare answer that question. Next we have "Rock and Roll Girls" by John Fogerty. It looks like rock and roll television from the '60s, like *Shindig* or *Hullabaloo*. Fogerty is very understated. He has on a plaid flannel shirt. Don't you think he looks a little like Glen Campbell?

EGBERT: Actually, yes. What do you think he'd do if he wasn't a singer?

CISCO: He looks like he'd be a catcher for the Boston Red Sox.

EGBERT: Yeah, he doesn't look like a centerfielder at all. More your basic Carlton Fisk type. Durable, good arm, good hitter, good with pitchers.

CISCO: The next batter is "Our House" by Madness. This is a fun video. Madness' horn section looks like the Three Blind Mice.

EGBERT: Everybody in Madness has on those tweed cabby hats favored by the working class and golfers early in this century.

CISCO: The lead singer has a real fun haircut, a '50s crew cut.

EGBERT: In fact, he looks almost exactly like Roger Maris. I wonder if he's a right-fielder?

CISCO: The house that is the subject of the song is a very nice house. How would you describe it?

EGBERT: It looks as if Archie Bunker might have been born there. This video is zany in the tradition of "Hard Day's Night." It has band members playing mom and pop. Here's a tennis racket guitar solo. Now the band members suddenly switch from public school uniforms to Beatles uniforms.

CISCO: Now we are cutting to a catalogue of houses. Houses with huge formal dining rooms, swimming pools and indoor palm trees, squash courts. Houses with turrets. I'd love to have a house with a place like that.

EGBERT: Not in England. They don't have heating. That's why they wear a lot of sweaters and hats indoors and those gloves with no fingers on them. That's where Boy George got those gloves. Everybody wears them in London so they can chop garlic or pick up postage stamps without freezing their hands.

CISCO: Next we have Eurythmics' "Would I Lie to You?"

EGBERT: It starts out with lead Eurythmics

Dave Stewart chatting with band members in the dressing room. Meanwhile Annie Lennox arrives on the back of a motorcycle.

CISCO: She seems to be breaking up with her boyfriend, who is the driver.

EGBERT: He wants to know if she's going to be home late, and she says maybe she won't come home at all. I'd say their relationship is on thin ice. I'd say this is not her real-life husband, recently estranged. This cyclist does not look like he could possibly be a Hare Krishna. She arrives backstage visibly shaken, but Dave knows what to say: "Just be yourself tonight." This may be playing off their real-life relationship. They are partners in their music and in business, but not in romance. CISCO: She slinks out on stage in a tight black sequined dress. She has a very

she's dancing sort of like Shirley MacLaine in *Irma La Douce*.

CISCO: She is a sort of new wave Shirley MacLaine.

EGBERT: Uh-oh. Here comes her good-boy friend looking for trouble, shoving his way through the audience, pushing his way to the stage.

CISCO: Now he's up on the stage, blocking her from the audience and behaving in a generally threatening manner. Now the audience is coming to her defense; they're pulling him off the stage.

EGBERT: They're getting a little rough. They're pulling off his leather jacket. Maybe they're going to eat him. Oh, he got his jacket back! But I don't think he's had enough. He's a real troublemaker. He's wearing glasses, maybe in the hope that nobody will hit him in the face. The

CISCO: I don't know. If you're not yourself, who are you?

EGBERT: Maybe you who think you should be, or if you're romantically involved with the wrong person, who they think you should be.

CISCO: But if you aren't who you are, how do you know that you aren't, because the real you isn't around to know that you aren't the real you?

EGBERT: I don't know. I guess the best we can do is remember what Popeye said: "I Yam what I Yam and dat's all what I Yam."

CISCO: I wish I was Popeye.

EGBERT: The next video looks like it's for *Sade* . . . oh, no, it's an ad for *Advantage Night Musk* by Prince Matchabelli.

CISCO: Is that Prince's last name?

EGBERT: This is definitely the sexiest video we've seen, even if it's only an ad. I wonder if there's really a Prince Matchabelli?

CISCO: Next we have the Who doing "Twist and Shout" from their last album.

EGBERT: The most interesting thing about this video is that John Entwistle, the bassist who also sings lead on this one, has two Schlitz beer cans taped to the microphone, one on each side, with straws stuck in them.

CISCO: That's a trick that only a veteran musician would know.

EGBERT: Next we have "Rebel Yell" by Billy Idol. This is a live one.

CISCO: The guitar player looks like Johnny Thunders.

EGBERT: All guitar players now look like Johnny Thunders. It's too bad he couldn't patent that look.

CISCO: Billy has a nice face.

EGBERT: He carries a bullwhip around with him. I guess that's why they call it a bullwhip.

CISCO: I'd hate to be in his dreams.

EGBERT: What I'd really like to know is how he gets his upper lip to go up like that. That's more than a sneeze. Do you think he shoots novocaine into his upper lip before he goes on stage?

CISCO: How does he do that?

EGBERT: Lena Horne used to have a lip move something like that, but he's really carried it to a higher plateau.

CISCO: I wonder what Billy Idol's real name is.

EGBERT: Probably Norm Idol. His wrists are covered with studded, spiked wrist bands. I wonder if he ever hits anyone with them?

CISCO: Probably just photographers.

EGBERT: He must have tranched himself not to wipe his nose with the back of his hand.

CISCO: To me Billy Idol really represents decadence the way the old rock stars used to, like Keith Richard and Jimmy Page.

EGBERT: But he's in short sleeves. You know he doesn't have any tracks. I don't think he's on the needle.

CISCO: Yeah, but you just know that he doesn't go to bed at 11 and get up at 8.

EGBERT: I bet he stays up really, really late.

Well, Gene, we're out of time.

CISCO: Let's go get our hair done.

EGBERT: See you all again At the Videos.

Gene Cisco and Roger Egbert have never been seen at the same New York Mets game as Scott Cohen and Glenn O'Brien.



Paul Raciak

feminine body for somebody who affects a masculine look. She has good moves, a nice strut. I like her a lot more when she's being herself, as a girl than as a guy. She looks like she's a fun person. Do you know anything about her?

EGBERT: No, but I'm receptive.

CISCO: She might be on the serious side. EGBERT: The band has a lot of energy and good moves. The horns have those *Stax* revue steps down, and the black girls singing backup are very buxom and cute.

CISCO: Downright zatig.

EGBERT: An off-duty professional male dancer in the audience gets carried away and jumps on stage, piroetting. He is not clubbed to the floor by his girlfriend.

CISCO: Anne Lennox is very sexy!

EGBERT: Yeah, she's shaking her bootie. What's more, she has on those half-spikes heels that drove men nuts in the mid-'60s.

Pete Townshend twists and shouts

band keeps playing with a lot of energy.

CISCO: I like it.

EGBERT: I do, too, but I don't understand how the spurned boyfriend fits in.

CISCO: I guess they had to work in that line "Be yourself tonight." The boyfriend was holding her back from being herself.

EGBERT: Do you think that video will encourage young people to break up with their boyfriend or girlfriend?

CISCO: Only if their boyfriend or girlfriend wants them to be someone else.

EGBERT: And you think it's pure coincidence that Anne Lennox recently split from her husband.

CISCO: Maybe not, now that she looks like a girl again.

EGBERT: Did that video make you feel like being yourself tonight?

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# DO IT YOURSELF!

Wanna cut a record?  
Wanna know how?  
Geza X has produced  
the Germs, Deadbeats,  
and Dead Kennedys,  
and shares the experiences.  
Welcome to How-To Corner.

Article by Geza X



Ann Summa

**G**oing into a studio is like playing Pac-Man. Your options are limited only by your imagination and knowledge of the program. If you've never been at a recording session before and want to make a record, read on, especially if you only want to make a few records, say, 2,000 to 10,000. That's where you can lose your ass in hidden head trips.

Believe me, I learned all this the hard way. My first experience in the studio (did I say "experience"? Scam is more the word) happened because I talked a studio owner into letting me sleep on the floor in the studio workshop. The place was decrepit. All night I repaired equipment and all day I attempted to build "Studio B" in the adjacent rehearsal room. One day the owner asked if I could engineer a session, because his engineer was out of town. "Oh, sure, no problem"; suddenly I was an engineer. I recorded more mariachi music than you'll find in your favorite Mexican-restaurant jukebox—until someone brought one of the tapes back and played it for the boss. He sent me packing.

Then punk rock happened—right across the street, as a matter of fact. Brendan Muller had started Los Angeles's first punk club, the Masque, and things were never the same. I spread the word that I was a "record producer" (whatever that is), and one day Darby Crash, the late singer for the Germs, said, "We're gonna make a record" and *Slash* magazine (now *Slash* Records) is putting it out. We want you to produce it." At the time I thought the Germs, and particularly Darby, were disgusting—so I enthusiastically agreed to record it and the rest is punk history.

Next came the Deadbeats, which I belonged to at the time. We were the first—and only—"punk-jazz" band. Then the Bags (which I had belonged to before the Deadbeats). Then I recorded the Dead Kennedys, the last band to pay me for producing a record. I am not ashamed to admit that I was swayed the night I heard "Holiday in Cambodia" for the first time, still while remembering it. I vowed that if by luck I ever got a chance to record that song, I would make it sound like godhead. It's not every day that your wish comes true.

The studio we used was this tacky little place where, by all rights, I couldn't even record his. But they had these old tube microphones that I knew from experience were The Kind. The board was a joke—what you use to mix monitors on stage. To stop the tape machine you had to grab the reels and pull the tape by hand off the lifters—even in rewind. It's a wonder the tape wasn't chopped to ribbons. I had my work cut out

for me: "Holiday in Cambodia" became a sizeable hit, especially in Europe, where people have good taste.

After that I worked with dozens of other acts, such as Jossie Cotton. We recorded most of "Johnny, Are You Queen?" in a little basement eight-track studio. I spent most time under the tape machine repairing it than at the board recording it. It was a hit. Indeed, it can help you make a decent record under the kind of adverse conditions you'll certainly be faced with.

First, find a studio. They are plentiful and—for the most part—lousy. Your best bet is to find a record by a local band that sounds similar to what you want. Ask them where they recorded it. (If you're shy, have their crew find out for you at the next show or something. You must learn how to get the information you need.) Find out who the engineer was. Ask the studio to play you some tapes. Surprisingly, some of these studios are not expensive by today's standards. You should be looking for a "book rate" of \$30 to \$60, but don't let that fool you. Many different deals are available.

One word you'll hear frequently is spec, which is short for speculation. This means that the studio owns a percentage (usually large) of the finished product. They also own the master tape, since they're paying. The advantage is that you get the studio for free. The disadvantage is that you also get the studio owner for free, providing his "expertise" or bossing you around to impress his girlfriend. Usually this kind of deal only works for people who really know the rules. For example, major labels and big studios have protocol and contracts that specify who's in charge.

Another arrangement looks similar on the outside but can be advantageous—though generally not profitable—to bands just starting. A studio owner, record store, or local DJ may wish to produce a record (frequently a compilation), and either they own the tape or want to ball your girlfriend or they'll just put anything on it. The problem is that the band gets nothing. This arrangement is not a bad deal, just don't have any illusions because: 1) the studio probably owns the tape; 2) the DJ will wash his hands of all responsibility; and 3) the sleazy record company will stop returning your calls.

Usually compilations sell pretty well (10,000 to 20,000 copies), so you get your name out there. Just don't expect any money. Even if you have a contract, even if you actually get paid—the check will probably bounce. And God only knows how many they sold overseas, because you sure won't find out. If you don't get much money from your compilation track, there

could be two reasons:

1) Although they had the good taste to put your awesome group on the record, no one liked it. It didn't sell. At least 2,000 copies of an independent record must sell to break even. Unless the label is willing to do it for you, it's foolish for them to pay you until they are well into profit (which is rare), because they wouldn't be able to put out more records. You figure it out. Or:

2) You are world-famous and don't know it because the fly-by-night record company owner is a heroin addict. This is, unbelievable as it may seem, fairly common. It is entirely possible that your hideous little disc was godhead in Italy. . . .

So if your band sucks but you don't want to look like a fool, make extra sure you accuse everybody of shooting up your overseas royalties. It sounds great and it's a sure-fire way to make friends. In other words, there's not much you can do about it, so make the best of it.

Small record stores that issue compilations usually have the best reputation for honoring debts without a lot of complications. They handle records all the time, and they're on the other end of the 90-day credit system the rest of the industry, including independent labels, is bound to. They are often fans, and that helps, too.

**Publishing:** No law says you have to have a publishing company. The new copyright laws are easy—just send the copyright office two copies of your finished tape, along with a brief form. Don't give anyone the publishing rights until you know what you're doing. The record probably won't sell enough copies to affect the publishing much, and few radio stations will play it often enough to matter. For complicated reasons based on how publishing is audited, hit songs take more than their share of the pie. Guess who pays? Your small local hit. Even if it makes money, who wants to send it to you? The record company! Ha! As for compilation tracks, *Volume I* (if you're lucky) is paying the artists from *Volume I* with the profits from *Volume II*, which you're on. Wait for *Volume III* and perhaps then they'll pay you on (if they don't fold).

**Contracts:** Yes, it's best to have it all on paper, in advance. No, it doesn't always work that way. Yes, there will be misunderstandings later in direct proportion to how chickenshit or lazy you were in the beginning. But sometimes the excitement of the moment is worth the experience you gain when you discover that your name isn't on the record. Yes, you'll need a lawyer. No, he

If your band sucks but you don't want to look like a fool, make sure you accuse everybody of shooting up your overseas royalties.

won't actually do anything for you unless you ask specific questions like: "Who owns the tapes?" "Who owns the publishing?" "If the record flops, do we owe anything to anybody?" "Are they allowed to cross-collateralize—pay for other records with our record?"

**Finding an engineer:** If the studio you pick has the right sound, but their engineer is a dick or just isn't getting it, be extremely diplomatic and cancel the session. A good-sounding room is rare, and in a small studio the engineer is often the owner. Call home and pretend there's been an emergency. (If you don't like the studio, pretend you're drunk and leave.) Just keep in mind that even good engineers make mistakes, occasionally big ones. You have more right to get pissed when he erases the drum tracks than he does to feel upset when you blow the bass line, because you're paying, but try to be reasonable. However, he must make up any time either he or the studio might waste.

You should be aware of one other engineering problem: in my opinion, all engineers smug pot, and then they forget what they're doing. If he's genuinely incompetent, tell him he needs a bath and fire him. If he's also the owner, this might be a good time to grab the tape and leave. If he is not the owner and you have played your cards right, you may be able to make other arrangements. After a few ruffled feathers, they may let you bring in another engineer.

Most studios will let you bring in your own engineer if they feel he can handle it. Usually, you have to have one of their people at least babysit the place—which is good, because he's probably the nicest person on their staff and will probably help the fledgling engineer you just discovered in some rock club. This is about the best situation to be in, if you've done your homework. A club engineer will be flattered that you asked him and go out of his way to do a good job; he may even work for free. However, he shouldn't be too new. If he's made some good four-track tapes, he's probably OK, although there may be some fast talking required to get the guy from the studio to give him a quick crash course. If it doesn't work during the first few hours the tape is rolling, politely ditch him ("I thought we told you about the African marching bells. Last time it took 160 takes!"). If you think he may be green but has talent or is your brother or something, arrange for a test period at the studio. They can check him for you and will quickly refuse to let him work if he can't cut it. That way you don't have to be the bad guy.

#### Studio etiquette and household hints

—Do not put liquids on the mixing console, ever! There is no way to overemphasize this point. One stupid mistake can cost somebody \$10,000 or more. (It can be repaired, but never like new.) If you let the owners see you moving ashtrays, banana peels, etc., away from the board, they might help you a little more, and good records are the cumulative results of many small gains.

—If you owe the studio money, they get to hold the tape as collateral. I don't want to harp on it, but if the tape sounds awful and you have examined your conscience three times and as God's your witness the studio is burning you out of your life savings, politely tell them that you're a little short of cash and let them hold the tape. Take your stuff home and unplug the phone. If you bought the reel (\$75 to \$150), tough luck. Incidentally, studios frequently charge twice what other suppliers (if available) will charge for a roll of tape. So look around and you can save \$50 or more. It's good to have an extra hour or two of recording when you



Mr. X (opposite page) has twirled knobs for the Weirdos (above) as well as Dead Kennedy Jello Biala (below).

need it, but find out exactly what kind of tape you need. Write it down. This is a costly, embarrassing, and common mistake ("Uh, I got Scratch 666 tape, just like you said").

—Booking time is not flexible. Some studios will not charge for set-up time, but if you get there late it's an insult, and they may do an extra-shitty job on your tape for revere. Especially if they can't take an interest in you and are doing it on spec. Just because they're paying for it doesn't make their time worth less.

—Don't let everyone talk at the same time. If you do, it will give the engineer flashbacks and he will ruin your tape. (Then you can criticize his extraordinarily poor engineering to anyone who will listen to your stupid mouth.)

—Don't bring all your friends. If you must have an audience, let it to your girlfriends or something, but explain to them that any rules of conduct that apply to you apply to them double. Your friends should stay out of the way and keep their mouths shut. Surprisingly, many people don't understand this.

—Stay organized. Plan ahead. Discuss general plans before each session. Everyone likes it better when they know The Plan. It'll cost less and you'll have to deal with fewer tantrums from whoever's paying.

Here is a sample budget and schedule for two to four songs:



Session 1) Eight hours for "basic tracks" (drums, bass, guitar, reference vocal).

Session 2) Five hours for "overdubs" (extra instruments, solos). One good trick is to double the rhythm guitar and vocal—record the exact same part twice. This adds fullness to the sound.

Session 3) Five or more hours for vocals.

Session 4) Five hours mixing.

—Make copies after each session. You can practice to these at home and save muchelo dollars, which is a good thing because it's going to cost you five times what you expected anyway. Figure \$400 and another \$100 for tape to get you in so deep there's no turning back.

—Drugs or alcohol may be unavoidable, but learn to gauge when you're spun even though you think you're making progress, because one day you're gonna wake up to discover you put your perfect solo, which took nine hours, in the wrong part of the song. Make certain to blame the engineer. You may even get away with it, if you gave him any.

—Bring extra everything. If you break a string or drum head in the middle of the night, or the battery in your fuzz box goes dead, you will regret forgetting something so obvious. Shall I tell you about all the times somebody left the master tape at home and had to drive back 40 miles to get it?

—Keep tapes away from magnets, UFOs, and X-rays. Don't let your headphones, hand-worn, and bitchin' tape next to the speakers in lack of a lamp; you will erase all \$500 of it. Also, avoid the machines at the airport that sees through your luggage—I don't care what they tell you, hand carry all your tapes. Even getting the tape within 10 feet of a color television set makes me nervous. Be paranoid to the point of lunacy and you won't get hurt.

—Rehearse your ass off before each session. Look for parts that are clashing. Adjust your equipment as carefully as you know how. Ask outside people for advice, within reason. Make a good record, don't simply expect a few hard-earned bucks to buy one.

—Morale is probably the most important thing of all. Watch the mood closely and put effort into it. Remember that there is a built-in conflict between the practical realities of time and the need for a relaxing atmosphere. Consider the pacing and abandon dead ends. Don't panic, even if it's running late and you have forgotten your part. If you all agree beforehand to cooperate and encourage each other, you may actually surprise yourselves with a hot little record.

**Discounts:** Most studios will give you a discount if you use your own engineer (except one-man studios, which more likely won't allow an outside engineer, because they can't risk any equipment damage). A "block booking" of 10 to 20 hours might get a discount if you use large portions at a time. Late-night sessions usually cost less, too, as does paying up front, or paying cash. You could conceivably bring your own engineer, work from midnight to 6 AM, pay 20 or 30 hours in advance with cash, and save several hundred dollars that you would otherwise spend if the project were too expensive to pay for itself.

Oh, one more thing. If anyone involved in anything to do with an independent recording ever gives you a check (fat chance), go straight to his bank and cash it. Run. If it bounces, call him right away—while you're still mad and before he figures out a story. Tell him to give you cash. For about an hour after the check is written, he probably has the money somewhere nearby (like his new stereo) and may be willing to hook it out of guilt.

Next month: producing a master disc from your tape.

# NEW SOUNDS

He plays a weird-looking 10-string violin and his exotic solos can be heard behind Zappa, Phil Collins, Talking Heads, and Van Morrison. The instrument is one-of-a-kind. So is Lakshminarayana Shankar (L. Shankar to his friends).

Column by John Schaefer

From the relative safety of his apartment in Manhattan's theater district, violinist/composer Shankar is recounting some of his harrowing experiences in his native India. "In 1982, I was supposed to tour there with Shakti [the group he founded with John McLaughlin in 1976]. I was already in India with all the lawyers and promoters when John called and said he had hurt his hand and couldn't make it. Well, they didn't believe me—they thought we were trying to back out, and I was practically under house arrest for a month!"

Shankar now performs more often in North America and Europe than in Asia; not only is it safer, but he's in demand in the West. His inventive, exotic violin solos have been used by Frank Zappa, Phil Collins, Talking Heads, Andy Summers, New Order, Copeland, Peter Gabriel, George Harrison, and Van Morrison. In 1980, he has pursued a solo career, centered on his one-of-a-kind, 10-string, double-necked electric violin. His first release with that instrument was 1981's *Who's To Know*, an album of Indian classical music. *Vision*, released in 1984, featured two well-known jazz musicians,

saxophonist Jan Garbarek, and trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg. "The 10-string violin really helped me on *Vision*," Shankar says. "Because when I had the regular single violin, I could only play leads or solos. But I can use the double violin for accompaniment, because it can play chords and creates so many different sounds." Earlier this year, Shankar released *Song For Everyone*, again with Garbarek, who serves as the main soloist, with Shankar and a pair

of percussionists providing background.

For many, Shankar's name is a source of confusion. He is not related to Ravi Shankar, the famous north Indian sitarist. In fact, Shankar is not even his family name; it's his given name. "When I was touring under the name of L. Shankar, people were coming up with all these names that the L stood for," he recalls. "Leo, Louis, Lenny—there were many things being called Shankar! So I dropped the L. Now it's just Shankar." In southern India, the father's name is usually given first, often simply as an initial, followed by one's given name. The L, by the way, stands for the common and easily pronounced name of Lakshminarayana.

Shankar's band has changed its name as well. Two years ago, it was known as Sadhu, after Shankar's pet rabbit. When the rabbit died, he changed the band's name to The Epidemics. The lineup includes the gifted double bass player Percy Jones (who has played with Brand X and Brian Eno) and singer Caroline Morgan, who co-founded the group with Shankar. "We both share the lead singing," he says, "because I've always loved the male/female vocal combination." The group also includes keyboards, guitar, live and electronic percussion, and occasionally even the tamboura, an ancient Indian drone instrument.

Shankar's small but comfortable apartment houses a synthesizer, the tamboura, and also, but just barely, a cat of truly planetary proportions and a white rabbit (Sadhu the Second). The double violin is never out of Shankar's sight—and for good reason: it is the only one of its kind. "I really should have a second one now," he says.

The first was a result of his work with different instruments. "On *Touch Me* [1981], I overdubbed a lot of different instruments. And in concert, I'd play viola, cello, and bass. That gets very difficult. So I tried to design one instrument that I could use for all the others and play in any situation. Necessity was the mother of this invention, I guess."

In 1980, he completed the model and had it built. The lower neck covers the bass and cello range; the upper neck is violin and viola. The body is curved so all 10 strings can be played at once. There are two volume controls and a stereophonic pickup, resulting in a remarkably clear sound.

Shankar's music is rich and melodic. On paper, the instrumentation for *Vision* looks completely outlandish: sax, trumpet, and electronic violin. But on



Joseph Vento

disc the sound is extraordinary. The double violin produces sweeping orchestral effects that would be the envy of many synthesizer players, and the solos are fluid and to the point. *Song For Everyone* features tight ensemble playing, a dazzling display of percussion, and some of the catchiest tunes Shankar has written. The Epidemics would seem to be a logical extension of *Song For Everyone*, except that the songs are intended as simple pop tunes. The lyrics are in the "What would I do without you" vein. But when Percy Jones starts pulling out his unique flanging, almost vocal effects and Shankar takes off on one of his slurring, alien-sounding solos, you wish for a whole album like that.

"I've tried to combine different traditions," Shankar says. "Music styles are like colors or painting: there are so many things you can do with them." But when he's playing rock, jazz, Indian music, or Western classical music, Shankar considers a piece's structure the most important thing. "Sometimes someone will really master an instrument and just play solos, but if there's no structure, there's nowhere to go. That's why jazz rock died so quickly, within 10 years. I think the only group still going now is Weather Report, which has stayed around because Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul are so fantastic—they play real music, not just technique. In my music there are improvisations, and even within the composition the players have their own variations; but for me, the structure is the important thing."

For all that, Shankar is a brilliant improviser, the result of 14 years of study

in India, where he began singing at age 2 and gave his first violin concert when he was 7. Shankar left India in 1969, when he was 18. Although his father, V.V. Lakshminarayana, is one of India's most celebrated violinists, Shankar's family wanted him to become an engineer. "Subramaniam [his brother] was already a doctor," he recalls, "and they were really pushing me to be an engineer, even though I played a lot of concerts already. I was sick of college, and then they sent me to study physics! So I was trying to get out." Shankar was offered a teaching post at Connecticut's Wesleyan University. From there, his move into Western music came rather quickly.

While Shankar and Subramaniam have made successful careers in the West, the third violin-playing brother, L. Vaidyanathan, chose not to leave India and still works there, giving concerts and writing film scores. But Shankar has not forgotten his native tradition. "I recently played a concert with my father," Shankar says, "and he loved the double violin; we actually switched instruments for a while. I use it in India, too. People love it there; they call it LSD—L. Shankar's Double Violin."

Shankar's next solo album, *MRC5*, will probably appear next year. Already recorded, it features Shankar playing keyboards and drum machine. Following that, Shankar plans to do another album of Indian classical music with his father. After his experiences with Shakti—which included canceled tours as well as the debacle in India in 1982—Shankar has learned, perhaps the hard way, to handle his own affairs. He is now his own manager.



# ASSISTED TWISTER

A 17-year-old fan gets the chance to interview Dee Snider. Interview by Van Santana

**S**eventeen-year-old Van Santana of Mastic Beach, Long Island, was recently selected the "Person With the Best Reason to Interview Dee Snider for SPIN," a contest sponsored by radio station WRCN in Riverhead, Long Island. Her reason, blunt and to the point: "I would be the most qualified person." Van, who attends Brookhaven Occupational Center, a vocational school, is a reporter for the school newspaper. In the past, Van has won a trip to Astro World in Houston and a pair of roller skates, but never anything like this. Her report:

"Accompanied by Charlie Lombardo, WRCN's No. 1 DJ, I rendezvoused with the wild-haired master of heavy metal and lead singer of Twisted Sister in the second-floor offices of Atlantic Records in Rockefeller Center. It was breathtaking as he burst in and strolled over to the window, turned around, and beamed the most sincere and heartwarming welcome I could ever have imagined."

SPIN: How did Twisted Sister get together?

DEE: We got together in February 1976, and the three remaining members from those days are me and the two guitar players, Jay Jay French and Eddie "Fingers" Casale. Mark Mendoza joined about 5½ years ago. A.J. Pero joined about 3½ years ago.

SPIN: What's written on the music?

DEE: I write all the songs, words and music. I'll come in and show them the chords and the guitar riff and I'll say I want this kind of drum beat and this kind of bass line, and they develop it from there.

SPIN: Did you all know each other before starting Twisted Sister?

DEE: No. Eddie and Jay went to school together, and they had been in bands locally, in New York. Jay is from Manhattan, and Eddie's from the Bronx. We heard about each other through the New York club scene when I was playing in other bands. The bass player, Mark, was in The Dictators. He was touring around with Kiss and bands like that, and whenever he wasn't on the road he would come down to watch Twisted Sister. We sort of became friends. After he quit The Dictators, we had an opening for a guitar roadie; he heard about it and said he would take the job. His band had toured the world. I didn't understand why he wanted to be a guitar roadie. He said he would rather be a guitar roadie than a regular job, because he couldn't find a band. So he became roadie for the band, and when our bass player left, Mark was there. He was our friend, and he was a great bass player, so we took him in. A.J. was somebody who came down to see us all the time. When we were looking for a drummer, A.J. knew someone who knew the band, and that person got A.J.'s tape to us.

SPIN: Where did you grow up?

DEE: I haven't grown up. I'm a terminal teenager. Baldwin, Long Island. I went to Baldwin senior high school. Not fond memories.

SPIN: When did you start getting into music?

DEE: I think I always liked music. I can remember liking rock and roll records before I was 7. That was when I saw The Beatles on the *Fel Sullivian Show* in 1964. That was when I decided to be a rock and roll star. That's when I formed my first band, which was called Snider's Fighters. I was crazed then, too. At the time that I was singing rock and roll, they found out at school that I could sing, and I was put in the glee club, singing classical music. Glee club! What a stupid name.

SPIN: Who came up with the name Twisted Sister?

DEE: A friend named Michael. I'll leave his name off because I think he's paralyzed. He had a car accident. It was a real problem. We had the look and the image and we were trying to find the right name. Michael called up Jay Jay from a bar one night and said, "I got the perfect name." "What is it, Michael?" "Twisted Sister." It was the one stroke of brilliance in his entire life, and now he's paralyzed from the neck down.

SPIN: How did you get the first time up on stage?

DEE: I can't officially remember the first time. If you're talking the *first* first time, you're talking on the picnic table, in the backyard, behind Jackie I-forget-his-last-name, playing air guitars (tennis racquets) and garbage cans, miming to Beatles records for 40 people. It felt good. I like the power of being on stage, especially when all the amps are going. As a singer, you're getting in front of it. It's all coming from the back and it feels like it's being channeled right through you. It's kind of

the band! Say we got Madison Square Garden. One day we bring 10,000 people from Ohio, they make one trip, and for them it's a big thing. They can sacrifice. Why do we have to drive everywhere? Let the people drive every once in a while. Why don't we make a package deal, like a ski trip? You get a T-shirt, ticket, bus pass, and meal ticket for Horn & Hardart's.

SPIN: What color underwear do you have on?

DEE: Today? Blue with red trim. I never wear white. White is disgusting, plus it shows piss stains. Yellow is embarrassing and brown's the same. I'm into color. My favorite are Fruit of the Loom "Great Looks." I don't think they make them any more. There's a seam under the crotch that pulls it all together for the total look.

SPIN: How do you psych yourself up for a concert?

DEE: I think about things I hate, negative energy, because that's what rock and roll is all about, the release of negative energy. It relieves the frustration, anger, hostility, confusion, and those nasty feelings that arise from day-to-day living. So in the last five minutes when we're backstage, I start to get mean and angry. When I go out there, I'm on fire. I'm pissed off. That's why I curse so much. I'm fuckin' pissed! Then, as I'm performing, I'm feeling less angry, and then I start to feel good. I think the audience feels that way, too.

SPIN: Why do you wear makeup?

DEE: It makes our concert shows more special. You're not looking at guys who look like everybody else on the street.

SPIN: Do you ever sleep with it on?

DEE: I used to. We used to go home with it on, after gigs, until I got arrested. It was a driving offense. They took me in and gave me a lot of shit. They put me in a cell and they kept me up every shift, banging on the bars, looking. "Look at Snider in cell one." After that, I stopped.

SPIN: What did you do before Twisted Sister?

DEE: I had a lot of odd jobs. I was a busboy, a short-order cook at Jones Beach; I used to clean up the beach with one of those sticks; I used to clean bathrooms; I drove a taxi; I wired computer programs; delivered newspapers; I was a landscaper, and that just about covers it.

SPIN: When you're off stage, do you like to be alone?

DEE: Absolutely. When I get off the road, I try to get away as far as I can. I'm moving because my house is besieged by fans. People don't see a rock and roll star as a normal person. It's unfair. We're on call 24 hours a day. There's one place you shouldn't be on call, and that's your home. You should be able to look like a piece of shit. It matters to me as a rock hero to people that I don't let them down, that when they see me I'm what they expect, no doubt about it. But sometimes you're home and you don't feel like washing your hair, you don't feel like shaving and getting dressed, and you feel like walking around in your underwear. The blue ones, with the red stripe. Then there's a knock on the door. You open the door, and there's some fan standing there. You're bummed out for him seeing you like this. He's bummed out because you didn't expect him. His picture was something different, and you beat his bubble and fucked up his dream. I like because I had my own heroes. If you're a mechanic and you work in a garage all day and you go home and you're watching TV and somebody knocks on your door, one of your customers, and he says, "Listen, my carburetor's gummed up. Come outside and fix it," what would you say? "Hey, I'm off duty, don't come to my house to fix your carburetor. This is my time." It's the same with Twisted Sister.



Girl on right is Van Santana.

scary. I must have liked it, because if you didn't you wouldn't do it again.

SPIN: Do you get stage fright?

DEE: Once, semi-recently. We opened for Motorhead. We went to England, we had no record out, nobody heard of us, makeup bands didn't exist. We were doing a daytime outdoor festival, and we had never played in the daytime before. Somebody had pulled some strings, there was a cancellation, and we wound up second on a seven-band bill, in a soccer stadium, and it was Motorhead's audience. Have you ever seen Motorhead's audience in England? The guys are better looking than the girls, and the guys are ugly. It is a mean crowd. And here we were, and I was shitting a brick, I'll tell you that right now. I haven't been scared in a long time, but I was scared, because I knew that this was the whole ball of wax. We were working on the first album, *Under the Blade*, and we went down good here, word would go out. Every writer was there. They wanted to see how this band with makeup would do down. We had hair and makeup, a band called Girl, and Girl wore makeup, and they had been bottled and canned off the stage a month before. We were a big success. But as a rule, I'm not scared.

SPIN: Where do you enjoy playing most?

DEE: Close to my home. I'm not crazy about touring. I love playing, but not going from town to town—it's tedious. I mean, I've been on tour for 11 months now. So I got this new concept. Instead of having the band travel to the towns, why not have the towns travel to

# THE MAN WHO WOULD BE GOD

The blue Cadillac Seville pulls into Hollywood Center Studios on Las Palmas, proceeds through the guard station, turns left, and slides up to the curb in front of a pale green bungalow. The passenger door opens, and out climbs Brown of Brown & Williams, Williams of Williams & Brown, Pierce of Pierce & Girle, Harris of Dunlap & Harris, and Captain Blue of Captain Blue & Flippin.

Some more.

The former Barney Dornell, Maxey Kline, Willy Bagaert, and Lily Delight twirl and so desperation that he wended in drag pushes open a pair of glass doors, turns right, and gingerly walks to the end of the hall. Arriving at the last door, the ex-Nat Burns, monologist, as well as Burns of Jose & Burns, Lorraine & Burns, and Burns & Allen, enters the three-room office suite that he has occupied since 1950. He sits in a red director's chair and is immediately funny while being photographed for a magazine article.

"Tell ya a story," George Burns says.

At 89 years and change, he is the story, a regular Ripley's Believe It or Not, this Gorgeous Geriatric George, an act that never closes, still in precision command of all his punch lines in a marathon performance as the world's oldest working comedian, a legend not only in our time, but in Herbert Hoover's and FDR's, too. The photographer asks him to speak for the camera. A little performing, please, as if he needed prompting. "All right, I'll keep talking," says George, small, nattily dressed, silver-toed, big-spectacled and flicking his 90-cent El Producto Queen cigar (he smokes 10 a day) in a modified Groucho.

"Everyone is thinking I'm saying something clever. Actually, I'm saying nothing."

All right, kid, it's time for the record. "Put on the record," George tells his secretary, Jack Langdon. The song is "I Wish I Was 18 Again" from George's 1979 album. "Put it on," he repeats, and soon the paneled room is filled with the recorded George talking (the word term it singing) the sentimental title track as the live George jabs his half-smoked stogie to the beat. He is cooking.

Flashback. Same office. Another day, another time. George apologizes for being late. He was having his teeth cleaned, he says. "I dropped 'em off at the dentist. Don't forget to put that in the article."

George Burns, music man. Imagine him in a music video, squeezed between Madonna and Prince, flicking ashes on them. "I'd make one with all the old songs," he says. "They had the greatest verses ever written. 'Red Rose Rag,' 'Silvery Moon.' Why aren't the verses as good today? Who the hell knows?"

"I love music, but I've got no favorites," he says. "I



like country music. I like Willie Nelson and Kenny Rogers and I like what's-her-name, Dolly Parton, and her backup singers."

Backup singers? "You know, her two backup singers," he repeats, making circular motions on his chest.

You're his straight man. It's unavoidable. A typical George Burns anecdote hides a gag in ambush. The line separating George and Mike is invisible. Or maybe after more than eight decades of performing no line exists, the private and public man having ultimately merged into one.

"I love to tango," he says. "Ever do the tango? It hurts."

He knows. He had a dancing school when he was a kid. "Had it when I was 14 years old. We taught fox trot, a waltz, and a two-step for \$5. I hadda give it up. It was in a Polish neighborhood. I used to teach all these guys how to dance, but they couldn't dance with anybody but me."

"So whenever they went to a wedding, I had to go with 'em. I finally gave it up—they danced close."

Amazingly, at an age some 20 years beyond the average life expectancy of the American male, George is still dancing, tangoing toward 90 and, from all appearances, feeling no pain. His continued longevity and wide popularity is almost taken for granted, so much so that he has advance bookings at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas and is booked to play the London Palladium for two weeks when he turns 100. So much so that CBS signed him to open and close a new anthology series titled *George Burns' Comedy Week*.

Preparing to appear before local station executives at the annual CBS affiliates meeting, George tried out a gag on his writer, Hal Goldman, who was sitting across the office with George's manager, Irving Stein. "I thought I'd come out and say, 'Thank you. The first time I ever played for CBS was in 1929, and I must have done well. Here it is 56 years later and I'm back!'"

As it turned out, George could woo the affiliates with a different gag: "When I was on stage, somebody came up to me and said, 'Mr. Burns, you're 89 years old. When are you going to retire?' I said, 'I can't afford to retire. I gotta support my mother and father!'"

Actually, his father died at 47 and his mother at 69, and the only member of George's family to match his longevity was his sister, who died at age 93. "I called her up once and asked her how she felt. She sez, 'I'm 90,' and hung up." It was his mother, though, whom George recalls as being especially funny.

"Tell ya a story," George says. "I brought home a girl once. I was about 14 and she was 16 or 17 and she wore lip rouge. In those days if you wore lip rouge you were a prostitute, and she not only wore lip rouge, she

Greg Garson  
He's most famous as God, but has as many stories to tell as cigars he has smoked, and that's 10 a day for God knows how many years.

Article by Howard Rosenberg



Courtesy of Leonard

*"The first time I ever played for CBS was in 1929, and I must have done well. Here it is 56 years later and I'm back."*

had a beauty mark, a little heart. I sez, 'Momma, I want you to meet my sweetheart.' She sez, 'How do you do.' She sez, 'Are you Jewish?' and the girl sez, 'No.' So my mother turns around at me and sez, 'Go to hell' in Jewish. And she turns around at the girl and sez, 'I just told my son what a charming girl you are.'

Goldman and Fein howl.

"Tell the story about your dad in the synagogue," Fein said. "Tell ya a story," George says. "My dad was a half-assed cantor. If the cantor got sick, they sent for my father. So on Rosh Hashana the cantor got sick and they sent for my father. The next Rosh Hashana the same cantor got sick again. They didn't send for my father. They closed the synagogue. That's a joke."

Considering that it's been his hangout for 35 years, George's office holds relatively few pictures and mementos. There are far fewer memories on his walls than on the tip of his tongue.

Many years ago, in 1896 on New York's lower East Side, he was born Nathan Birnbaum, one of 12 children. "I never went through school," he says. "We came from a very poor family, and I went into show business when I was 7 years old." Little Natty and three friends got jobs making chocolate syrup. "There was

this letter carrier named Lou Feingold and he taught us how to sing harmony, and we were pretty good. So one day we're mixing chocolate and singing and there were four or five people up there on the steps listening, and they threw a couple of pennies at us. I said, 'Kids, we're in the wrong business. Let's get into show business.' They became the Pewee Quartet, roving performers who sang in saloons and on ferry boats, streetcars, and street corners. "We passed around our hats," George says, "and if they liked us they put them in pennies, and if they didn't like us they'd keep our hats—we lost a lotta hats."

The Pewee Quartet was electrifying. "Want me to sing a song we sang?" asks George. "Makes no sense at all."

A song they sang: "Mary Ann Mary Ann sat in the corner night and day night and day she was so lazy that we thought she was crazy well I don't know I don't know what's the matter with Mary. Some say the Bowery is not very flowery when Johnny comes marching Johnny getta gun getta gun getta gun and beat McNulty too. Where did you get that hat what hat the old red white and blue razzle dazzle . . . You don't wanna hear any more, do ya?"

No.

George's rise in show business was meteoric. "My first paying job was with a big act, the Fourth of July Kids. I was about 12 years old and there was a girl in the act. She did whistling and the manager of the act was having an affair with her and she kinda liked me. I couldn't do anything. I wore gloves and spats—No, my first job in show business was Goldie, Fields, and Glide. I was Glide. Fields was Nat Renard, not Fields. Goldie was a kid called Goldberg who worked in a laundry, but he couldn't sing unless he ironed. So on stage when he'd sing, he's still ironing. We opened at Miner's Bowery and we did five shows a day. I was in blackface. Fields did the Jew with the derby over his ears, and Goldie played the tough guy, and after the first show the manager came back to Fields, who had his hat over his ears, and said, 'What character are you playing?' Fields sez, 'I'm playing the Jew.' Then the manager looked at me in black face and sez to Fields, 'Then what character is he playing?' He didn't know the difference. We were canceled after the first show."

Exhausting a Rolodex of names and acts, George worked with anyone who would work with him—and anything. As Captain Blue, he shared billing with a seal named Flippin. According to George (who naturally won't verify), he carried a fish in each pocket for weeks, after which the girl he was dating (who was touring with Fink's Mules) told him she loved his aches shave.

He met Gracie in 1922 when he was a \$40-a-week comic in Unionville, New Jersey, and she was an ac-



ress working at the same club, and they were married four years later. Burns & Allen went on to become comedy superstars during a professional partnership that included a 17-year-stint on radio and eight years on TV, ending in 1958 when Gracie retired.

When they started out, Gracie threw George the straight lines. "The audience didn't laugh at my jokes, but they giggled at her straight lines, so I switched the jokes around," he says. "I knew exits, I knew entrances, I knew how to tell a joke. I knew how to switch a joke. But I didn't know how to do it on stage. So I would get the material, and Gracie was able to do it. But you'd never know Gracie was in show business. She let me have all the laughs offstage. She never told a joke onstage in her life. And you never heard Gracie tell an off-color story."

On stage, Gracie endlessly babbled while George reacted with bemusement or disbelief. They meshed. They were wonderfully funny. They'd end with George telling her: "Say goodnight, Gracie." And she would reply: "Goodnight, Gracie."

George recalls that they played the Orpheum in New Orleans, and dry cleaner then ruined Gracie's \$400 dress. "She wanted \$400 for it and the offstage, her \$25. So there was this routine we would do. We would dance, the music would stop, and we'd tell a joke. I would say, 'A funny thing happened to my mother I was born in Buffalo.' I'd say, 'Music,' and we'd dance again. So the music stopped and I said to Gracie, 'A funny thing happened to my mother in Cleveland.' And Gracie walked out into the floodlights. She sez, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I sent my dress to the Chiffon Cleaners

and they ruined it, a \$400 dress that I never had cleaned before. They're very bad people and don't send your clothes there.' Then she came back to me and sez, 'Oh, I thought you were born in Buffalo.' That was the end of that joke."

The stage Gracie was stereotypically scatterbrained. "The difference between Gracie [on stage] and all the other dumb girls on the stage was that Gracie didn't think she was dumb. She thought she was very smart. She thought you were dumb. When I asked her why she put salt in the pepper shaker and pepper in the salt shaker, she explained that people get mixed up and now when they get mixed up, they're right."

Oh.

Gracie's retirement thrust George toward a second career as a single at age 62. No Flipper. No Gracie. Despite their huge success, Burns & Allen didn't have much of a movie career. How ironic that George would ultimately achieve his biggest fame in later life in the movies, first in an Oscar-winning performance as a cranky vaudevillian replacing his best friend Jack Benny, who had died in Neil Simon's *The Sunshine Boys* in 1975, and later as The Creator himself in *Oh God!* and the sequel, *Oh, God! Book II*.

George gained a new audience as God, a role endearing him to a generation of youngsters. "Tell the story about the kid calling you," says Fein. "Kid called me," says George. "He sez, 'I wanna speak to God.' So I got on the phone. He sez, 'God?' he sez, 'Yeah.' He sez, 'God, we're playing baseball tomorrow. Please see that it doesn't rain.' I sez, 'Okay, it won't rain tomorrow.' He called me the next day. He sez, 'God?' I sez, 'Yeah.' He sez, 'Thanks, but we lost anyway.' Sweet story."

Is it true? "I don't know," replies George, smiling at Goldman. "Is it?" "The first part is true," Goldman says. Did the pre-*God* George ever consider that his career would be more lucrative, never mind not before *The Sunshine Boys*, not even when I was lazier. Even when I was canceled, I felt sorry for the theater manager. I was in love with what I was doing. I didn't care if the audience liked me. I still had makeup. I had pictures. I had music in my key. I'd go out and look for another job."

Happiness is work, followed by more work. He recently finished his sixth book with Goldman, his previous one, a feathery collection of whimsy, having spent 18 weeks on *The New York Times* best-seller list. He's got movie offers, club dates, college tours, adoring fans, energy, and, best of all, a trunk full of hats.

"Nowadays I'm an accepted commodity," he says. "I walk out on the stage and they stand. When I leave, they stand again. If you ask me to get up and stand here for one hour, I couldn't do it. But on stage, I can do it for two hours. The audience gives you that vitality. "A lot of Gracie's delivery rubbed off on me," he says. "Now when I'm on the stage, I explain everything to the audience the way Gracie would do it. I say that I became a dramatic actor when I was 79, and I found out that the most important thing about acting is honesty. If you can fake that, you got it made."

Gracie died of heart failure in 1964. How would she react to his success? "She'd applaud me," he replies. "She'd love it."

George Burns has lived in the same Beverly Hills house for 55 years and never varies his daily routine. If it won't fix it, he rises at 7:30 each morning, exercises for a half-hour, then does a 15-minute walk that's followed by an iron-pumping breakfast of three prunes and two cups of coffee. He arrives at the office close to 10 AM, departing at noon for Hillcrest Country Club, where he lunches on a cup of soup and a bagel, and then tries to find a bridge game. He returns home at 3:30 and takes a nap. At 5:30, he has two martinis and then either dines in or goes out to dinner with Cathy Car, his steady companion of four years. If they go out, he has more martinis. Carr is 39. "If I was young, I'd get married," George says. "Cathy's a great girl, but I'm too old for her. Above the waist I'm sensational. Below the waist I'm tacit. I'm gonna be 90 years old, for Christ's sake. I'm lucky if I can pee on my shoes."



At least he is still peeing. That is more than can be said for the rest of the old Hillcrest luncheon crowd—a sort of Algonquin West consisting of George Jessel, Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, Jack Benny, and Groucho, Harpo, and Chico Marx—who are long gone. George still lunches at their old table, which must have sagged under the weight of so many big egos.

"Tell ya a story about Jolson when he wasn't doing so well," George says. "He loved sturgeon. But they didn't allow sturgeon in California, so Jolson used to fly \$200 worth from New York. And if you'd compliment Jolson, he'd say, 'How would you like a little sturgeon for lunch?' I liked sturgeon more than I did Jolson. So I'd compliment him, and I'd get sturgeon. And then when *The Jazz Singer* came out [in 1927], I said to Jolie, 'Just heard the soundtrack, and it's the greatest I've heard in my life.' He sez, 'Kid, you can buy your own sturgeon—I'm a hit again!'"

George remembers Jolson as being the funniest of the group offstage. "He was standing at the bar at Hillcrest one morning and I watched him have three brandies

"I like what's-her-name, Dolly Parton, and her backup singers . . . you know, her two backup singers," he repeats, making circular motions on his chest.

and three glasses of beer. I sez, 'George, I been watching you and you have three brandies and you had three glasses of beer and it's nine o'clock in the morning.' He sez, 'Haven't you heard?' I sez, 'What?' He says, 'Norma Talmadge left me.' I sez, 'But she left you 35 years ago,' he sez, 'I still miss her.'"

Jessel may have been the Hillcrest peacock. "But Groucho thought he was the funniest," Goldman says. "Should I tell that story?" George asks Goldman. "Sure," says Goldman. "Tell ya a Groucho story," says George.

A Groucho story: "When you mention the top 10 comedians, you gotta mention Groucho. I always thought so. But when you're getting laughs with sarcasm, you can only do it until you're about 50 or 55. After that, you get to be a mean old man. So someone gave a party and asked me who is the funniest guy in the world, and I sez, 'The funniest guy to me is Groucho.' And Groucho sez, 'He's not the funniest man in the world. I'm the funniest man in the world.' Jesus, it shocked me to hear him say that. I said, 'Well, if you're the funniest man in the world, then I must be the funniest man in the world, because I'm funnier than you are. And I did it without my brothers.' Groucho didn't like that. Then he wrote a book and he said, 'Jack Benny is a great comedian and Burns has nothing.'"

Another Groucho story: "Tell ya what Groucho started. Groucho was fearless. If you said something and Groucho had a trooper for that joke, if you used the same line 20 times that day, he'd use the same trooper. Anyway, Sophie Tucker wrote a song: 'If you can't see momma every night, you can't see momma at all.' And every time I'd order sea bass, which I liked a lot, Groucho would say, 'If you can't sea bass every night,

you can't sea bass at all." That's a fercockta joke to begin with, and after you hear it for 17 years it's definitely not funny. So I came into the club and Groucho was sitting there and I didn't want him to hear me order sea bass so he could say that lousy joke again. So I whispered to the waiter, I sez, "I'll have some sea bass." He whispered, "If you can't sea bass every night . . ."

George's nomination for the funniest comic on stage is the late Frank Fay. "Frank Fay was a great comedian," he says. "He hated Jews, but he was very religious. So he used to eat at the Brown Derby and I used to watch. Just before his food came, I'd sit down and start to mention people that are dead. I'd say, 'Tom Fitzpatrick isn't with us any more.' He'd bless him and say a prayer. I'd mention five or six more people, and when his food got cold, I'd leave."

George's best friend was Jack Benny. "They were completely different," says Fein, who also was Benny's manager. "George is neat and Benny is sloppy. He could be in a hotel room five hours and the room would look like he'd been there for two months. Newspapers would be on the floor and the socks would be here and his hat would be there and his pants would be on the other bed and the messages would be scattered. George could be in a place two months and it looked like he just checked in. And Jack . . . Jack also liked to do sketches and dress up with the hats and crazy stuff on his eyes."

"Tell ya a story about Jack Benny," George says. "Jack Benny was very funny on stage. He was a great comedian. Off the stage he was pathetic. But he was very smart. He never did anything on the stage that he did off. So he knew what the hell he was doing. Now Jack Benny's great bit to make you laugh was this."

Fein is already laughing. George pulls a piece of tissue from a box and tears it in half. He bows his head, sticks a piece of tissue to each of his eye lids, then looks up. "This was Jack Benny's big bit."

"Okay, this is the great suave comedian. Now before he was married he was screwing some dame at the Forrest Hotel, and one morning he went down to her room to make her laugh. So he put on the two pieces of paper and pulled his coat down as if it didn't fit him. He knocked on the door. Someone said, 'Come in,' so he went in. She had checked out, four people were there having breakfast, and there was this Jewish schmuck standing there with two pieces of paper on his eyes."

George must have told this story many times in Benny's presence, and as he tells it this time, I can almost feel Benny in the room laughing at his friend's impersonation of him. "I think Jack Benny was the most courageous comedian I ever saw on the stage," George says. "Nobody could wait longer, just looking and fucking around and doing all that stuff that he did. And he made a bad joke great."

Benny, who was two years older than George, died in 1974. "We all went to Jack's house," George recalls. "He was very, very sick. The doctor was upstairs, and he came down, and Jack's wife, Mary, came down. She said, 'Jack Benny just died.' I went up to see him, and it was sad. He was lying there, you know, this way [arms folded on his chest]. Looked like he was waiting for a laugh."

What do you do when your best friend dies? "Well, what do you do when your wife dies?" George replies. "What do you do when your mother dies? What do you do about that? You gotta go on. What am I gonna do, make felt hats for a living? People die, unless you can find a new exit or a new entrance. Gracie and I didn't work at being married. We knew we were gonna be married the rest of our lives. I slept with Gracie. I ate with Gracie. I lived with Gracie for 38 years, 24 hours a day. When Gracie died, I didn't expect her to die. Gracie had a bad heart condition, and she would have had a bad problem if I'd give her some pills and I gave her pills and sent for the doctor. They took her to the hospital, and that night she died. And I was shocked. I said, 'Jesus, how can she die? I got all these pills left. They always worked before.' You cry and you carry on, and I did the same. And finally, after about a month or two



George Burns

months, I got outta my bed and I slept in Gracie's bed, and that did a lot for me." He visits Gracie's grave every month. "I talk to Gracie. I might tell her a joke that I heard at a party. I don't care if she can hear me. I enjoy talking to her."

Flash forward. Same office. Another day, another time. "I Wish I Was 18 Again" had ended, and so had the photo session. "See, I sang that slow, didn't I?" George says. "I sang it too slow."

He compares performing in the old days with today. "The kids nowadays have to make it fast to last. We had a great luxury. There were enough theaters to be bad in. You can't do that today. You gotta be good right away. And the kids say anything, all the four-letter words. If that's what people want, that's what they get. I let the audience get dirty. I don't do anything on stage that doesn't fit my age or in my mouth. I tell my age. I wear a toupee. I get laughs from it. The joke is that I meet a girl and I take her out and put on a nice suit and a nice coat and some cologne and comb my hair before I put it on."

"I'll tell you my favorite show business story," George says. "There was this great actor. In the summer he would play 10 weeks of vaudeville and then go back to Broadway. He was a Chippendales dancer after performing one afternoon. Brown & Davis went in the bar together, and the actor was there. And they said to him, 'We can't tell you how excited we are to be on the same billing with you.' He sez, 'Thank you, boys,' and they say, 'We would deem it an honor if we could buy you a drink.' And the actor says, 'I'm sorry, fellows, but I just got a wire. I lost my mother.' And Davis sez,

"We know just the way you feel. Our trunk is missing."

To call George Burns amazing is almost redundant. Merely to be breathing at 89 is a feat; to be truly alive is something more. "You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old," he says. "People practice to get old. The minute they get to be 65 or 70, they take little steps. Well, if you practice to get old, you will get old. I don't think anybody should retire. That's ridiculous. Imaging a guy retiring at 65. At 65, I had gonorrhea."

One final question for George Burns, the delicate question you put off asking someone who is approaching 90. Does he ever think about dying? George is obviously shocked by the questioner's ignorance. The cigar leaves his mouth. "Whaddaya mean dying?" he replies. "I already died. I died in Altoona."

Say Good night, George.



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happen to me. I'd gotten stagnated in that damn studio. I'd sit there, man, and just start creating songs like this [snaps his fingers]. I'd get my nut, then go upstairs and start playing with girls. I did that for five or six years, but that's being selfish, man. Ain't it, with all I have to give? Here I am getting nuts by myself. Why can't I give it to everybody? I've been underground, but I'm going to come on top with this new revue, like a damn volcano."

To fulfill this dream, like says he now spends most of his time meeting with musicians, writing songs, and conferring with lawyers or promoters. Conferences with friends are held in one of Turner's houses, located in Baldwin Hills, Huntington Harbor, Bel-Air, and North Hollywood. Delaney Bramlett relates, "The North Hollywood house looks like a crash pad. There wasn't much furniture around. It was a far cry from his studio, yet you could tell like was really getting back to music. Instruments lay around everywhere."

Besides dealing with "a few lawsuits," which he refused to discuss further, like's also been trying to recoup thousands of dollars in lost royalties and to sell a batch of previously unreleased like and Tina songs. "I let things slide," he explains. "Now I'm straightening my life out." I ask him, "Do you have any tax problems?" like looks at me quizzically. "Tax problems," he admits. "Everything goes screwy up after Tina and he broke up. . . ."

"I paid people to straighten my affairs out, and they haven't. My taxes haven't been brought to date. They're three years behind. I owe California money, but I don't care about that. I'm sure there's other people out there that I owe money."

After dismissing this issue with a shrug, like caresses Barbara's leg again, and returns to more familiar and pleasant territory: his lifelong pursuit of women.

"I love sexy girls, but let me tell you, man, speaking of mistakes, I'll never marry no more as long as I'm chocolate. If there is anything called reincarnation, or whatever they talk about, I want God to make me a longer neck. That way I'd do my own self. . . . I won't need any woman. In other words, I'd be able to give my own self head."

"I've been whorish all my life. Even as a kid I had to have a pretty girl. But man, this has caused me lots of trouble, lots."

"Now I go to do for myself, for like. I bought Tina rings, mink coats—I never put aside a penny for like. If I had charged her for being the booking agency, the arranger, the director, the writer, if I had been paid a third of that, I wouldn't be needy."

"I gave my whole life to her, and after I did, she used me to a point, and then she didn't need me anymore. She says she was brainwashed. Man, I never did that! Sure I have my ways, my temper, the women, but I was like that when I met her."

"I know people think I'm some pimp, that I just put her out there," like says, his temper flaring. "She can have her 'Private Dancer,' 'What's Love Got to Do With It.' I've started to do the other song instead."

Softening his voice and carefully enunciating each word, he melodically recites, "You're asking everybody what love's got to do with it? Why, when you tried it, you didn't want to quit it! But now you wanna do it in the family pot. You wanna plant me now, come back, and do it later! But you know you're a fool, you know you're in love! You've got to face it to live in this world, you've got to take the road along with the bad! Sometimes you're happy, and sometimes you're sad! You know you love him, but you don't understand why he treat you like he do! He has you smiling when you should be ashamed! Got you laughing when your heart's in pain! Oh now, you know you're a nut, you let that man get your mind messed up! How come? You're just a fool. You know you love him."

Playing nervously with a book of matches, like plaintively says, "I really do care for that woman. I hate that we don't communicate, that she forgot where she came



from. I don't know, man, she always said she never wanted to be black. And she's really showing that. I wonder if she's doing all these write-ups to convince some people that she's not coming back to me, so that she can reach her goals. After she does that, maybe she intends to come back and say, 'See, I did it, I did it by using whitey to get there. Now you do it.' I think she's doing this stuff just to prove something to me. Why else would she still be talking about me after all this time?"

like takes a wad of hundred-dollar bills from his pocket and throws one on the table.

"Come on, let's go," he shouts at Barbara. "I can't talk no more. I'm too stirred up."

Not bothering to wait for change, he walks quickly through the restaurant to the rear parking lot. While waiting for the attendant to take his ticket, he grimaces and again attacks Tina's new image.

"Believe me, man, I don't want anything bad to happen to her. I made mistakes, I dealt with Tina physically instead of mentally. It's very hard to deal with black women mentally. It's like you have to put some fear in them to communicate."

"But what she's doing with our kids now just isn't right. She's convincing white people that she only cares about one of her kids, the one [Craig] she had before me. The others, especially our son [Ronnie], she's saying she never wanted him, that she didn't want to mother him. That hurt me, man. When we were together we never treated any of them differently. Not Ronnie, Craig, or the two sons I had before Tina [Ike, Jr., and Michael]. So we broke up. She's saying that Craig is the only one she wanted to mother. This is the only time I've really been mad at her. Can you imagine those kids walking around and people saying, 'Ah-ha, Tina ain't your mama.' I don't care what she says about me, but my kids, that ain't right."

"Michael once tried to physically take me out of the studio to take him to see Tina. He desperately wanted to see her, so he went to her house, to bring her back to me, and she put him in a nut house [in Culabashas, California, a tiny highland town north of Los Angeles]. The kids can't even go to see her. They don't have her phone number. They have to talk to her sister, Eileen. Tina won't even talk to them. Tina's changed so much, she's changed so much. . . . I don't know why she's doing this."

Later like Jr. also a musician explained to me: "Mi-

"I don't know why these things happen to me. Maybe it's envy, hate. I don't know why these stories about me appear. I don't bother anybody. I stay home all the time."

chael wanted my mother and father to get back together, and the next thing I knew he was in the hospital. He was hurt by their being apart. I didn't think he was crazy. They kept him in this place a long time. I thought he was normal, I don't know why she did that.

"I've tried to call my mother at her management's offices. They take a message. I've called a good 10-15 times, but I've never heard from her. I know she's busy, but I don't know why she hasn't called. I love her, she brought me up, she's my mother."

"It kind of feels like she's neglecting us, at least us three: me, Michael, and Ronnie. I talk to Ronnie all the time, and he doesn't hear from her. It's to the point now where we're always wondering 'where is she?' I got a book from her last Christmas. I feel that now that she has her stuff together she doesn't really think about none of us. Not like my father did. He never treated any of us any differently, but she does."

Depleted, like leans against a column outside the restaurant waiting for the valet to bring his car. As the car arrives, Barbara kisses me goodbye. Muttering to himself, like slides into the front seat and bangs the door shut. He sits there silently for a few moments before announcing, "We'll finish this soon. I'll see you in New York in a few weeks."

**A** week later, like calls me at 2 a.m. from L.A. His voice is heavy, strained with emotion. "Man, that woman keeps talking about me. Did you see her on that fucking *Good Morning America*?" he complains, sounding as if the walls of his house are closing in on him. More epithets follow. He talks about Tina's doings in the kids, the trouble he's having getting started up, and Tina's continued badmouthing. He's having a bad night. We talk for two hours. Then he hangs up.

Three days later, SPIN photographer Earl Miller arranges a meeting with like, but as he prepares for the shoot, someone calls for like and cancels. Two more days pass without any word from like. Then, after several unanswered phone calls, Miller is suddenly told to appear at an L.A. address. He's led through a maze of rooms before being brought to like. like explains he had to cancel the previous meeting because two men had appeared at his house with guns and taken two of his cars.

Hearing of like's troubles, I try to call him, to see how he is. But all his phone numbers have been changed. ☺

# SPIN

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SPIN-4

In case you somehow missed these major news stories, we didn't . . .

After hubby told her to SHUT UP in 1952 . . .

# ANGRY WIFE DOESN'T TALK FOR 33 YEARS

**Angry wife shuts up her big-mouth hubby — with super glue!**

**WIFE BEATERS**  
*And Sweethearts Association*

**Oh Daddy**  
**Don't**

**Be Good And I Won't**



Jesse Williams, 29, of 5349 Delmar declares that he found it necessary to flog Loretta Preston and to threaten her with a gun to make her obey his laws and orders. Twice he threatened to crash her head in if she didn't act right. It is hard to get them to comply with orders says Mr. Williams.

**Oops!**

**Parents sue caterer claiming ham served at boy's bar mitzvah**

**Widow begs sperm bank bosses:  
*'I want to have my dead husband's baby'***

**BLONDE'S BOMBSHELL**  
Transsexual vet wants to be American Legion boss

**HOW MUCH OF PAT'S MONEY DID DON GIVE THE "OTHER" WOMAN?**

Don Brown, 19, a sort of Don Juan, the lover, resides at 4005 Greer. Evidently he left home yesterday. He drove over to the sometime home of his ex-wife, and about 3:30 p.m. he encountered lovely Patricia Nedrow, 36, who is white. He drew a gun on Pat at 1027 S Vandeventer and robbed her of \$120 in cash and jewels.

It was revealed that Don Brown wanted to get enough to take to his girlfriend. Someone saw him staging the robbery and got his auto license number as he drove off. This did it. Yes baby!

Officers Gary Wierter and James Anderson of the 7th District were told that Anthony Cowan, 19, of 5056 North Pointe, visited his parents' home, 1001 S. 10th, home, 5001. Etend and they had a lot of fun until they drugged too much ignorant juice. For no apparent reason at all, Cowan slapped Ford on the head, grabbed his bicycle and destroyed it and then stampeded Cowan's US-speed bicycle in pieces. Ford fled from the scene and was nowhere around when police arrived.

**DESTROYS FRIEND'S HEARING AID, FLEES**

Two youngers got their bellies filled with so much liquor while having a private party at a home, and when themselves that one grabbed the other's hearing aid from an ear and destroyed it.

Officers Jerry Jones and James Anderson of the 7th District were told that Anthony Cowan, 19, of 5056 North Pointe, visited his parents' home, 1001 S. 10th, home, 5001. Etend and they had a lot of fun until they drugged too much ignorant juice. For no apparent reason at all, Cowan slapped Ford on the head, grabbed his bicycle and destroyed it and then stampeded Cowan's US-speed bicycle in pieces. Ford fled from the scene and was nowhere around when police arrived.



**MEDICAL SHOCKER!**  
Dead woman gives birth — 6 hours after she drowned

**Pig saves farmer's bacon!**

A farmer knocked unconscious in a wreck was rescued by a pig when the pig ran over and brought the injured man's wife back to the accident scene.

Li Ming-hui, a 28-year-old farmer in Matou, Taiwan, was taking his stud pig to a neighboring town when the three-wheeled cycle collided with a car about a half-mile down the road from home.

Poison in Matou said the driver of the car drove off in the rescue, running home to fetch the farmer's wife.

Police said the clever pig in a pen, but the animal became free and ran back to the accident scene and grabbed it and fled with his dog. The dog is valued at \$200.

Lin was hospitalized in satisfactory condition.

The members of Guadalcanal Diary are sitting with their manager in one of those chain restaurants that plague the shopping malls of the suburban New South. You know the ones—lots of dark-stained wood, hanging plants, and cheap replicas of soda-fountain signs from the 1890s. They ignore the menu, which features tuna fish on a croissant. Nobody's eating—they've got a record-company meeting this afternoon. Singer Murray Attaway, guitarist Jeff Walls, bassist Rhett Crowe, and drummer John Poe will soon sign a contract with Elektra Records.

Murray: "Just buy us a few rounds of drinks and then we'll start to get real colorful—if you want that kind of copy."

Their hometown of Marietta, Georgia, is manicured and middle class—hardly a mecca for the hip and aspiring. Quitting your restaurant job to be in a band here would probably raise a few eyebrows.

Jeff: "We've all had day jobs until pretty recently."

John: "Except me. I'm the only one who hasn't been able to hold one down."

Jeff: "Murray was a waiter at all these different places. Rhett was a freelance graphic artist, but that has pretty much fallen by the wayside, too."

Murray: "They already think I'm a big star at Rascal's. They have all the copies of magazines we went in. We could be some stars, you really would have liked Rascal's."

John: "You would only go back to Rascal's when you could pull up in a limo. I'd like to write songs about bad service in restaurants."

Jeff: "Broken reservations!"

Rhett: "Sorry, we don't have that! Sorry, we're out of that! No, that's not on the menu any longer!."

Murray: "Why not just make financial statements in your songs? You could be some megastar whose brain's been turned to mush by drugs and lavish life-styles and really think that somebody cares whether you own a mansion and a big car."

John: "I'm waiting for the day I can write 'Where Have All the BMWs Gone!'"

Guadalcanal Diary had been together for a year and a half when their first EP was released on Atlanta's DB Records in July 1983. They titled it *Watusi Rodeo* because their producer said one side sounded "cowboy" and the other, with a version of Miriam Makeba's "Lwandle Mvula," "African."

John: "Our first record was done by a local producer, Bruce Baxter. He produced a lot of Atlanta groups—the first Pylon record; the first Swimming Pool Q's record; 'Rock Lobster,' the first B-52s single. Danny Beard/DB Records used Bruce for most of his stuff back in those days."

Jeff: "DB Records has essentially been



John: "XTC."  
Murray: "Jesus."  
Jeff: "Elvis."

Murray: "I grew up on country music; my grandparents listened to it constantly. In high school I was a big Yes fan. I liked David Bowie's stuff—Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane. I liked Roxy Music—their first few albums—and The Velvet Underground."

Jeff: "Me and Murray went through a period right before the band started of getting into old country music, particularly Johnny Horton, George Jones, stuff like that. I don't have a whole lot of favorite current bands, but I like The Gun Club a lot."

Their harder-edged cuts, such as "Ghosts on the Road" and "Watusi Rodeo," hit the mark. The Gun Club missed because Guadalcanal Diary never takes itself too seriously, but then Murray's willowy tenor, especially on "Sleepers Awake," transcends the cowpunk kitsch. With these three songs, the well-turned pop of "Pillow Talk," and sing-along cover of "Kumbayah" all on one album, you might think the band was maybe a little schizophrenic.

John: "Prior to the first EP, each song kinda sounded like it was from a completely different band. After you get used to playing live, you have to develop a more linear approach to the music."

Jeff: "We've got our own style from what all of us agreed on," came in. "For instance, me and Murray liked a lot of country music that John hated. John's drumming is a lot more ambitious than most hokey country groups. We've always had real diverse tastes."

Guadalcanal Diary is a band to watch. The "Watusi Rodeo" video, produced by manager Warren Clinton, took third place in the nonfiction category of the American Film Institute's video competition last year, while MTV's "The Cutting Edge" named it 1984's video of the year.

What's their next video going to look like?

Murray: "It's gonna be a black screen with a tiny little red dot in the middle of it."

Jeff: "The dot's gonna sit there and suddenly go off the screen. That's all you'll be able to see for two minutes."

Rhett: "When the video ends, it'll stay in your eyes."

Murray: "We're gonna try to do something that'll give people permanent cornea damage."

Jeff: "Like a big, bright flash at the end."

Rhett: "Our next project will be the greeting-card business. We've decided to give up videos altogether."

John: "It's not a bad idea—Happy Holidays From the Guadalcanal Band."

Left to right: John Poe, Jeff Walls, Rhett Crowe, and Murray Attaway.

## THE GUAD SQUAD!

Guadalcanal dialogue  
about day jobs,  
snake handlers,  
and permanent cornea damage.

Article by Sue Cummings

responsible for the Athens scene, with the exception of R.E.M. But I see us fitting in with the Athens thing the way a band from Minnesota would. We're the Marquette scene."

Murray: "Maybe the Dekalb, Illinois, scene."

Jeff: "The Smyrna scene—that has a good ring to it."

John: "The Oyster Bay, Long Island, scene."

Their debut LP appeared in October 1984—all jangly Rickenbacker guitars succinctly driven by a big drum.

John: "We were walking through the square one day in Marietta. It was the Fourth of July, and they were having a festival or something—people were in the grass and people catching a greased pig, all that kind of stuff. A gospel group was singing an old song that sounded like 'walking in the shadow of the big man.' . . . Which became the title of their album. The music press immediately—and overeagerly—elaborated on the record's spiritual references."

Rhett: "We got a couple of people recently thinking we were a Christian rock band."

Murray: "They wrote about 'Why Do You Like the Heathen Rage?'—some of the lyrics, stuff like that. In just about every interview, somebody wants to know about the brooding religious overtones of the music, but it's there."

Jeff: "It's definitely something we grew up around in the South—southern Pentecostals. For us it's just kinda interesting and fun."

Murray: "Yeah—our next album's gonna be called *Handle My Snake*."

Rhett: "A woman on all fours on the cover with a snake sticking in her face!"

Murray: "And they shall take up serpents . . ."

Walking in the Shadow of the Big Man is the title of the second installment of the band's work with Elektra. Its producer, Don Dixon, was also responsible (along with Mitch Easter) for all except R.E.M.'s current release. That in itself has encouraged comparisons between the two groups.

Jeff: "I think all that will probably change. There's not a lot of current music whose influence shows up in our stuff." So with whom would they like to be equated?



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